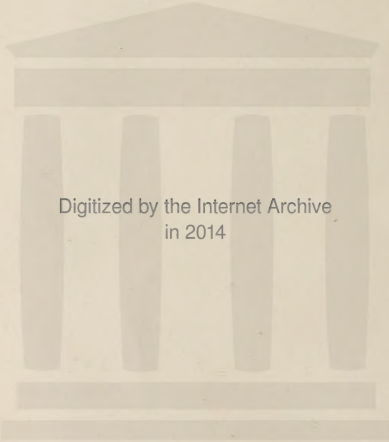


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THE
THEOLOGICAL
WORKS
OF
WILLIAM VAN MILDERT, D.D.

LATE LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM.

IN SIX VOLUMES.

VOL. V.
SERMONS AT LINCOLN'S INN.

OXFORD,

PRINTED BY S. COLLINGWOOD, PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY,

FOR JOHN HENRY PARKER;

AND J. G. AND F. RIVINGTON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD,
AND WATERLOO PLACE, PALL MALL, LONDON.

MDCCCXXXVIII.

SERMONS

PREACHED BEFORE

THE HONOURABLE SOCIETY OF

LINCOLN'S INN,

FROM THE YEAR 1812 TO THE YEAR 1819,

BY

WILLIAM VAN MILDERT, D. D.

PREACHER OF LINCOLN'S INN,

NOW BISHOP OF DURHAM.

1832.

SECOND EDITION.

VOL. I.

OXFORD,

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STREET, LONDON: BY J. H. PARKER, OXFORD: AND BY
MESSRS. DEIGHTON, CAMBRIDGE.

MDCCCXXXII.

TO
THE MASTERS OF THE BENCH
OF THE HONOURABLE SOCIETY OF
LINCOLN'S INN,
THE FOLLOWING SERMONS
ARE INSCRIBED,
WITH SINCERE REGARD AND RESPECT,
BY THEIR OBLIGED
AND FAITHFUL SERVANT,
W. DUNELM.

The Author has, for some years past, intended, in compliance with the wishes of several friends, to commit to the press a selection of the Discourses he had preached at Lincoln's Inn; but has, till lately, been prevented by an almost constant pressure of public duties. A protracted indisposition, by affording an interval of comparative leisure, has enabled him at length to carry his intention into effect.

January 1831.

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WHETHER this question was put with any serious impression of its importance, or with careless and even contemptuous indifference as to its result, does not distinctly appear.

That the Roman governor was much perplexed by the demeanour of Jesus before his tribunal, is evident. But it is also evident that he regarded the whole investigation as of political rather than of religious concern. When, therefore, our Lord, in answer to the question, "Art thou a king?" replied in the affirmative, but declared that his kingdom was "not of this world," and added emphatically, "for this purpose came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth," Pilate appears to have been struck with a conviction of his innocence, and to

have been moved to some degree of admiration at the extraordinary pretensions he assumed. For immediately "he went out again "unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find "in him no fault at all." And the sequel of the narrative shews his solicitude to release him.

This, however, is no direct proof that Pilate took any real concern in our Lord's spiritual character and office. Satisfied, from the answers of Jesus, that his doctrines were wholly unconnected with secular views, and relieved from all apprehensions that he was a turbulent member of the community, the heathen governor probably felt himself exonerated from any further responsibility. His question, "What is truth?" might import no more, than "What is it to *me*, whether this "doctrine of yours be the *truth*, or not? I sit "not here to decide such matters, but to "judge of your conduct as a member of the "state." In like manner, Gallio, the deputy of Achaia, when Paul was brought before him, accused by the Jews of worshipping contrary to their Law, would take no cognizance of the matter, because he "cared for none of "those things^a" which were alleged against the Apostle.

^a Acts xviii. 17.

But should we incline to suppose Pilate not altogether unwilling to inquire into "the truth," of which Jesus spake, yet must we regard him as proposing the question with the views and sentiments of a person conversant only with heathen philosophy. Respecting truth, moral, political, and metaphysical, various were the disputations in the schools of philosophers, and various the tenets maintained by their respective teachers. Among these, no more authority, properly so called, belonged to one, than to another; nor was it deemed of much importance what particular sect bore sway over the public mind. Pilate, therefore, might be inclined to gratify a momentary curiosity respecting any new system which this extraordinary Teacher had to propose; imagining, that, like many other systems, it would prove to be matter of merely speculative inquiry, such as might with impunity be rejected or received.

But whatever we may conceive to have been Pilate's views and motives, (an inquiry comparatively of little moment,) there can be no doubt of the importance of the question itself, when considered, as *we* are bound to consider it, with reference to *revealed religion*. The dissimilarity, in this respect, between the impression it must make on the

mind of a heathen, and on that of a Christian, is manifest. Where no divine revelation was concerned, as in the case of the heathen, the question, "What is truth?" could create but little solicitude. It was limited to human opinion, and not referable to any authority binding upon the inquirer. Whatever influence the result might have upon the understanding, it would have little power to control the will. The will is, for the most part, but feebly actuated by the simple perception of truth; its chief impulse arises from the apprehended *consequences* of the truth. Respecting these consequences, the heathen inquirer was involved in darkness and uncertainty. His moral and religious speculations were scarcely more interesting than disquisitions on physical subjects. His intellectual faculties might be awakened and gratified by the research; but his heart and affections would remain untouched. He might become a more enlightened sophist, or a more expert disputer; but would make slow and doubtful advances to perfection as a moral agent. It is not until the question bears reference to something more than *human* speculation, that it creates a deep and permanent interest. With records before him, professing to be of *divine* com-

munication, the inquirer who asks, "What is truth?" asks, in effect, What doth God require me to believe and to do? For the answer to this question, he has recourse, not to fallacious or fallible oracles, but to such as can neither deceive nor err. He places himself under the guidance of an authority paramount even to his own judgment;—an authority which calls upon him to submit his finite and often erroneous conceptions to those of Wisdom infinite and infallible; which claims the entire control over his most unruly affections; and obedience to which is no less his interest than his duty, no less his profitable than his reasonable service.

This view of the subject involves, however, consequences of greater moment than may at first be apprehended, with reference to the rules and principles whereby we are circumscribed, not only in our inquiries after religious truth, but also in our conduct towards those who either set it at nought, or substantially differ in their views of it from ourselves. To ascertain the proper boundaries of our liberty in this respect, is a matter of no light concern; if we would escape the evils of a dangerous latitudinarianism on the one hand, or on the other, of an uncharitable and presumptuous spirit.

There are those who seem to imagine that they are free to speculate as unreservedly upon *religious* opinions, even though declared in *holy writ*, as on any other subjects of investigation ; and that they may regard with equal tokens of satisfaction persons of every religious persuasion, whether embracing tenets entirely accordant with their own, or tenets which they themselves could not embrace without self-conviction and self-reproach.

A latitude like this might well consist with the notions of a heathen philosopher, bound by no other obligation than the deference due to the superior talents of others, or the confidence he might repose in his own imaginary superiority ; and who, whatever were the opinions to be adopted, knew that he was following a *fallible* guide. But the believer in revealed religion cannot take to himself this liberty, without an implied denial of the perfection of that word which he professes to acknowledge as *divine*. If there be any such thing as religious truth affecting our eternal interests, and authenticated as proceeding from Infinite Wisdom itself, this can never be a fit object for human caprice to sport with, or respecting which errors of carelessness or of indifference can be regarded as free from blame.

It has been a favourite sentiment, however, with infidel writers, and even with some who would not willingly be included in that class, that we may conceive the "Father of all" to be pleased with *diversities* of faith and worship, just as an earthly parent may accept with complacency different tokens of affection from his offspring, and reward them with equal favour. But religion, *revealed* religion, knows no such puerile fancies; nor will the parallel itself hold good, if the fact be admitted that a divine revelation has been made of the *kind* of faith and worship required of us. For, in that case, (which is the case as it actually stands,) our heavenly Father hath not left it to our option what kind of offering we are to bring, but hath prescribed what that offering shall be; and if, notwithstanding this, we presume to choose for ourselves, instead of complying with His injunctions, shall we not rather be regarded as children of disobedience, than as children of His love and favour? In short, the sacred oracles being put into our hands for the express purpose of making known God's will, it is at our peril that we presume to swerve from that will. Truth is, in its very nature, exclusive of error. It admits not of contrarieties. Whether it affirms or denies, whether it prohibits or

commands, it speaks decisively, and makes no compromise.

But almost self-evident as this principle appears to be, it is not without its difficulties, when we come to apply it to particular cases. Is religious truth (it may be said) so clearly revealed, even in the sacred oracles, as to admit of no difference of opinion, without incurring the charge of contumacious opposition to the Divine will? Are we warranted in peremptorily dogmatizing on the various subjects it involves? Does error necessarily imply heretical pravity? Or may we (like that Church against whose presumptuous claim to infallibility we have long since protested) deny the hope of salvation to all who are not within the pale of our own communion?

In answer to these questions, let it be observed, that when we speak of truth as excluding error, we speak of it as it exists in the written word itself, not as delivered in the words of man's interpretation. The latter must ever be fallible; the former never can. No harsh judgment is passed on involuntary mistake or ignorance, no positive guilt is attached even to tenets irreconcilable with God's word, unless the error be the result either of some habitual unwillingness

to search the Scriptures honestly, according to our means and ability, or of some sinister and corrupt bias of the mind, which might and ought to have been corrected. This it must be left to the Great Searcher of hearts to determine. To his own Master every one must stand or fall. It were presumptuous to deny the hope of salvation to those whose consciences accuse them not of error, even though we may justly think *our own* salvation would be endangered by following in their steps.

But why, then, not enlarge the pale of our communion, and give the right hand of fellowship to those of whom we entertain this charitable persuasion?—The answer is simply this:—Though we may admit the innocence of error, under the supposed circumstances, we cannot honestly put it on a level with truth. This would be practically denying the truth, and convicting ourselves of falsehood. Nor would it even be consistent with the duty we owe to those who hold the error. “Brethren,” says St. James, “if any
“ of you do err from the truth, and one con-
“ vert him ; let him know, that he which con-
“ verteth the sinner from the error of his
“ way shall save a soul from death, and hide
“ a multitude of sins^b.” But how shall this

^b James v. 19, 20.

be done, if we admit such persons into our communion whilst they maintain opinions, even on important points, which we deem it our bounden duty to reject?

Another question, however, here occurs:—Who shall decide upon controverted opinions? Who shall determine “what is truth” between disputants disposed on neither side to yield? This question directly involves the right of *private judgment*; a right that every man may reasonably claim in a matter pertaining to his own personal well-being;—a right, moreover, which ultimately every man not only *may*, but *will* exercise, secretly or openly, notwithstanding all attempts to fetter his moral or his intellectual powers. Nevertheless, since we presume that truth does actually exist in holy writ; since every profession of the Christian faith is supposed to be thence deduced; and since *our own* profession of it, whatever it may be, is by us presumed to exhibit that faith entire and pure; can we be blameless or excusable in acting as if we thought otherwise? How can we evidence our sincerity and integrity, but by maintaining our own persuasion, to the exclusion of contrary persuasions? How, in any proper acceptation of the phrase, can we be said to “hold fast

“the profession of our faith^c,” if we swerve from this simple rule of conduct?—Even upon the broadest principle of private judgment, no latitude is allowable for *indifference* to the truth, when once our judgment is deliberately formed, and grounded upon conviction. And what is the proper ground of such conviction? Undoubtedly, to entitle it to any weight, it implies the careful exercise of reason, both in weighing the evidences of revelation and in ascertaining its import; that the inquirer may frame his creed, and regulate his conduct, by what he deems to be the sole criterion of unerring truth. On subjects so momentous, what ingenuous mind can consent to form a hollow and delusive union with sentiments repugnant to his own?

In applying these observations to ourselves, as members of a Church, whose pretensions have long been recognized, both at home and abroad, as classing it among the purest of the reformed churches in Christendom, matter of serious reflection presents itself to our minds. When it is considered, that the truth set forth in the Church of England is *that* which was generally received in the primitive ages of Christianity; *that*, which after having been obscured and defaced

^c Hebr. x. 25.

by a long series of corruptions, was restored to its original purity and lustre, through the labours of men "mighty in the Scriptures," and devoted to the cause of truth; *that*, moreover, which was then sealed by the blood of martyrs, and has since been stedfastly upholden by the learned, wise, and good; shall we be charged with "the foolishness of boasting," if we say, that the question, "What is truth?" admits *now* of a satisfactory answer, by a reference to the system of faith and worship adopted in the confessions and rituals of our venerable establishment?

Too true it is, that the Scriptures, though the only infallible standard of religious truth, are continually alleged in support of opinions the most opposite to each other. Yet this does not derogate from the perfection of Scripture itself; nor ought it to shake our confidence in its truth. The sources of many of these variations it is not difficult to trace. Doctrines there are, in revealed religion, in themselves mysterious and profound; above the reach of our limited faculties clearly to apprehend; or, for wise reasons of the Almighty, not entirely unfolded to our view. Upon these, ardent, inquisitive, and incautious minds will ever be in danger of "making shipwreck of their faith." Doctrines

may also be perverted, or rendered obscure, by the arts of controversialists to uphold a favourite hypothesis, or by ambiguity in the use of terms of definition, or by inadvertency of whatever kind.—Again, there are questions, arising out of matters of unnecessary and unprofitable speculation, which men are wont to engraft upon the more essential truths of revelation, and to argue them with even more warmth and vehemence than matters of greater moment. There may also be positions in Scripture not so distinctly propounded as to preclude different deductions from them, even among persons well qualified to decide, and on which it were therefore wise to forbear too magisterial a decision. In all these cases, it may truly be said, that the differences originate not with *Scripture*, but with the *Interpreters* of Scripture. Truths, however, there undoubtedly are, and those of the highest order, which, being fundamental and necessary to the whole system of our faith, are also, for the most part, so clearly revealed, that they can hardly be either rejected or vitiated, but by those who “handle the word of God deceitfully.” When, therefore, it is said, and truly said, that “the Bible, and the Bible *only*, is the religion of Protestants,” it by no

means follows, that every reader or interpreter of the Bible is equally able to extract from it the pure and entire system of truth which it contains. *There* unquestionably the truth exists; *there*, and there *only*, it is to be found perfect. But, without the ordinary attainments of human learning, or the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit, (now no longer to be expected,) no one will be fully qualified to digest and interpret its contents: and he who though destitute of these pretensions, will not consent to be guided by others, incurs a hazard fearful in proportion to the value of the blessing that is at stake.

If this be so, and if we ourselves are thoroughly satisfied as to the soundness of faith and purity of worship maintained in the Church with which we hold communion, the question, "What is truth?" will no longer involve us in perplexity. We shall deem it an invaluable privilege that we are not among the number of those who are "ever learning, "and never able to come to the knowledge of "the truth^d," nor of those who refuse to "stand "in the old paths, and walk therein, that they "may find rest unto their souls^e." Possessed of such spiritual advantages, the fault will be

^d 2 Tim. iii. 7.

^e Jerem. vi. 16.

our own, if we turn aside to vain and unprofitable disputes. “Buy the truth,” saith the Wise Man, “and sell it not^f.” It is “the pearl of great price,” for which he who knows its value will “sell all that he hath to purchase it^g.” He will obtain it at any cost; he will part with it for none. He will not barter it away for sordid *interest*. He will not yield it to corrupt *pleasure*. He will not sacrifice it to mistaken views of *candour* and *forbearance*. But he will retain it stedfastly as his own best treasure; and gladly dispense its benefits to others.

Thus have I endeavoured to set before you, not the particular doctrines and propositions comprised in a full answer to the question, “What is truth?” but the magnitude and importance of the question itself; the mode by which the proper answer to it may be obtained; and the conduct by which our regard to it should be manifested; to shew, that, though when proposed by an unenlightened heathen it might excite little interest, it presents to a believer in God’s word consequences which cannot be contemplated without the greatest solicitude; to shew also, that when the truth is found, it is an impe-

^f Prov. xxiii. 25.

^g Matth. xiii. 46.

rative duty to uphold it, and to preserve it inviolate; and, lastly, to suggest the special advantages, in this respect, that we ourselves enjoy, and the weight of that responsibility which such advantages impose upon us.

Both to those who *preach* the word, and to those who *hear* it, a word or two of admonition may hence be not unseasonably addressed.

The question, "What is truth?" is that which every *minister* of Christ's Church is more especially bound to consider, and, according to the ability that God hath given him, to propound the answer to it, for the edification of his hearers. Our Church, moreover, hath given ample security to her members, that this answer shall not be left to the precarious judgment of those who are appointed to the ministry. Her Liturgy and Articles are intended to be a standard of Scripture-doctrine; a test, to try the soundness of our preaching, and its correspondence with holy writ. These, while they give security that the word of God shall not be "deceitfully handled^b," serve also as guides to ourselves in the discharge of this part of our duty. They suggest the most important topics of discourse; they assist in framing clear

^b 2 Cor. iv. 2.

and consistent expositions of Scripture; and they connect a reverence for those sacred oracles with an affectionate attachment to our Church. From this model of doctrine and discipline, he who has formed correct notions of the evangelical office will never intentionally depart. His aim will be, to “preach “the truth as it is in Jesusⁱ,” and to maintain and enforce it in unison with the pattern these rituals set before him; not wandering, on the one hand, into enthusiastic or mystical extravagancies; nor, on the other hand, degenerating into cold, metaphysical disquisitions; but “reasoning out of the Scriptures^k,” inculcating faith as the basis of practice, and practice as the evidence of faith; endeavouring, throughout, both to convince the judgment and to gain the heart.

To the *hearers* of the word also, these are subjects of equally momentous consideration. To know HIM who is “the way, the truth, “and the life^l,” is the sum and substance of Christian *faith*. To be like unto HIM who left us an “ensample that we should follow “His steps^m,” is the perfection of Christian *practice*. In this Christian country (blessed

ⁱ Ephes. iv. 21.

^k Acts xvii. 2.

^l John xiv. 6.

^m 1 Pet. ii. 21.

be God!) the lay-members of our Church have full opportunity of “*knowing* these “things;” and “happy are they, if they *do* “themⁿ.” In every part of this kingdom, “high and low, rich and poor, one with another,” have the Gospel preached to them. It is preached to them in the *Scriptures*; it is preached to them in all the forms and offices of our incomparable *Liturgy*; and we will venture yet further to say, it is preached to them in the *discourses* of the great mass of our parochial clergy. Countless multitudes have gone before us, we trust, in this “straight path” to Heaven; and what should hinder those who follow in the same path from obtaining the same blessed recompense?

Well indeed would it be for us, both individually and collectively, if these benefits were always justly prized. But since “the preparation of the heart,” as well as the illumination of the understanding, are “from the “Lord^o,” and since, though “one may plant, “and another may water, it is God that “giveth the increase^p,” let our humble supplications be unceasingly offered up to the throne of grace, that HE, from whom cometh

ⁿ John xiii. 17.

^o Prov. xvi. 1.

^p 1 Cor. iii. 7.

“ every good and every perfect gift^q,” may bless us with “ a right judgment in all “ things ;” “ granting us in this world knowledge of his truth, and in the world to come “ life everlasting.” Now, &c.

^q James i. 17.

SERMON II.

ACTS v. 38, 39.

If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it.

THE maxim here laid down as a test of religious truth derives an extraordinary portion of interest from the circumstance of its being delivered by one of the most distinguished members of the Jewish sanhedrim, in the hope of prevailing with that powerful body to relax in their persecution of the Christian faith. Gamaliel, who proposed this argument to their consideration, stands recorded in history as a man of preeminent reputation among the Jews, for learning, and sanctity, and devotion to the Jewish Law. Under his instructions St. Paul had imbibed that zeal for the Law, so strongly manifested in his vehement opposition to the disciples of Christ. The Jewish talmudists relate, that he was president of the council, and had at

tained to the highest title of distinction ever conferred upon the doctors of their Law. It is also recorded, that, upon his death, extraordinary marks of respect and veneration were paid to his memory: and even his posterity appear to have been zealous and successful in maintaining a similar reputation. These honours sufficiently attest his stedfast adherence to the religion of his forefathers.

The words of the text, however, seem to indicate something like a surmise on the part of this celebrated teacher, that the Christian religion might possibly be *true*. They manifest, at least, a more candid and dispassionate inclination than that of his brethren in the council, not hastily to pronounce it to be *false*. And the argument by which he endeavoured to restrain their vehement proceedings has long since passed into a standard rule, or maxim, by which all similar questions may ultimately be decided. Had the Jews in general, and Gamaliel in particular, acted fully up to the spirit of this maxim, it might have wrought their conversion to Christianity. But, unhappily, the advice seems to have been regarded rather as a matter of prudential forbearance, than of sincere desire to weigh the pretensions of the Gospel by this standard; and the growing success of the Gospel, under

its manifold discouragements, even sharpened their resentment against it, and rendered it so much more odious in their estimation.

But, whatever might be the inconsistency of the Jews in this respect, the argument itself is of too much value to be relinquished by an advocate for the Christian faith; nor can we have any hesitation, when the question is rightly understood, to put the truth of Christianity upon the proposed issue: "If this work be of *men*, it will come to nought; "but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow "it."

The maxim here proposed evidently rests upon this principle;—that the Almighty will never give to any system of *error* or *falsehood*, published in His name, the sanction of His support; nor, on the other hand, will He ever withhold such support from any system of *truth*, which HE sees fit to promulgate: it being repugnant to the moral perfections of the Deity, that he should regard the former with a favourable eye, or suffer the latter to fail in its result.

This appears to be almost an indisputable proposition. It is subject, however, to some obvious limitations. First, it can only be properly applied to cases in which the manifest interposition of the Almighty appears to

be *necessary*, in order to prevent either the delusion of His creatures, or a misconception of the Divine purposes. To expect *extraordinary* interpositions of Providence, where no such necessity exists, where the case may safely be left to the unperverted judgment of mankind, and where the due exercise of their own faculties may sufficiently guard them against error, is manifestly unreasonable.

Again ; the measures of God's providence, whether *ordinary* or *extraordinary*, are always addressed to human beings as *free* and *rational agents*. But, however manifest such measures may be, to those who are willing to observe them ; they may be overlooked or lightly regarded by perverse or unthinking men. Unless the Almighty were, in every case, absolutely to overrule this free agency, there must always be a possibility, on the one hand, of *temporary* and *partial* failures ; and, on the other hand, that even falsehood and iniquity may for a while prevail against the truth. According to the present constitution of human nature, nothing less than a continual series of *miraculous* interposition could entirely prevent the occasional preponderance of evil over good : and such a compulsory mode of proceeding would produce, not the

deliberate and solid conviction of a well-regulated mind, but a blind and abject submission to irresistible power.

However irrefragable, therefore, may be the general truth of the maxim itself, cautions are evidently necessary in applying it to particular cases. Regard must be had to times, and persons, and other special circumstances, in judging either of the first introduction, or of the subsequent continuance and extension of any religious system. And since, even in the clearest manifestations of His will, the Almighty usually acts through the instrumentality of human means, and operates, without compulsion, on the freedom of human actions; we may reasonably expect a diversity of results corresponding with the diversities of human character: we may expect an alternation of success and failure, arising from such combinations of occurrences as the Supreme Disposer may suffer to take place, without any impediment to the *final* accomplishment of His inscrutable purposes.

These few observations may suffice to shew, that Gamaliel's position, however wise and just, is capable of misapplication. It is misapplied, whenever it is urged without reference to some *other* criterion of truth; when it is brought forward with an intent to super-

sede the rational investigation of those evidences which are the direct and proper proofs of a Divine Revelation; when it is prematurely relied upon, in consequence of some local, temporary, sudden, or partial success; or, when it presumptuously magnifies the result of the busy and persevering efforts of human agents into a proof of more than human energy.

These remarks I now proceed to illustrate, by reference to some striking instances in which the *use* or *abuse* of the principle in the text has been exemplified.

First, let us briefly consider it as it was applied by Gamaliel himself, to the subject of *Christianity*.

The mere *success* of the Gospel, without a due examination of its still higher pretensions to a Divine origin, will hardly be accepted by cautious inquirers as an absolute demonstration of its truth. It is a *collateral*, rather than a *direct* testimony in its favour. When produced in evidence to that effect, it is produced, not as an insulated, independent kind of proof; but as connected with the peculiar and extraordinary circumstances to which that success was owing. We state it to be inconceivable, that a religion *so circumstanced* as Christianity was, at the time

of its first promulgation, and for three centuries afterwards, should have spread and prevailed to such a prodigious extent, by human agency alone. We refer to the records of its history, for proof that works far above the reach of such agency were actually wrought for its support. We refer to the same records, for proof that all that human opposition could devise for its overthrow was carried into execution; and that the proportion of mere human energy called into its service was comparatively as nothing. This is the ground on which the advocate for the Christian faith raises an argument in its support, from the marvellous success which attended it. But in this is comprised, or rather is presupposed, the certainty of those extraordinary facts, which render its rapid and extensive propagation worthy of being thus adduced in confirmation of its Divine pretensions; and which were matters of universal notoriety to the Christian world.

The argument, then, is, in itself, of a *secondary*, not of a *primary* kind. It springs out of another, which lies deeper, as the root, or foundation, to which it owes its main support. We may therefore feel the less surprise, when it proves unavailing with those who reject the other evidences on which it virtu-

ally depends. To contend for the astonishing success of Christianity as a demonstration of its truth, with persons who will discern in it neither the completion of *prophecies* nor the performance of *miracles*; or who ascribe to its first preachers and disciples views and motives, means and qualifications, altogether at variance with that which history records of them, can be but a waste of labour. Such persons will readily imagine to themselves (or some philosophical unbeliever will readily imagine for them) *other* causes for its growth and progress; nor can we expect them to feel the full force of this consideration, so long as they resist the stronger and more certain proofs of the facts previously to be ascertained.

Gamaliel indeed, and the rest of the Jewish council, might, without incurring the imputation of credulous weakness, have ventured to *anticipate* the result of the issue on which he proposed to try this momentous question. He might safely have inferred, from what daily passed before him at that time, that such men as the Apostles could not have even *begun* thus successfully the work they had taken in hand, had not the powers which they claimed and asserted, been too clearly verified to admit of doubt. *Here* lay the

main point they were bound to consider ; and not simply whether the *success* of this new doctrine was sufficient to warrant their acceptance of it.

Christianity, however, is well able to abide the test proposed by this learned Pharisee, because it is well able to abide the scrutiny which must first be undergone, in order to render that test efficient. Its *continuance*, moreover, down to the present day, affords evidence in its favour, similar, in some respects, to that of its *first propagation*. It has stood many a fiery ordeal since its first struggles with Jewish and heathen persecutors. It has emerged from ignorance and barbarism ; it has overcome wit, learning, and malice ; it has broken the bands of all these, as well as the utmost force of secular power, confederated against it. This we hold to be indeed a token, that it is of GOD, and cannot be overthrown. But wherefore do we deem it such ? Because it tends to prove that the great leading facts upon which the credibility of Christianity depends were substantially true ; since upon the certainty of those facts only could it possibly have obtained any acceptance whatever : and these being such as clearly manifest a *divine* interposition, the *success* of the religion grounded upon them

may thenceforth legitimately be urged in corroboration of its *truth*.

Let us take now a well-known instance of an *opposite* kind, and try it by the same rule.

Mahometanism has had wonderful success : and no one knew better than Mahomet himself how to impress upon the minds of his followers a belief that this was an indisputable proof that it came from God. His religion spread far and wide, like flame before the wind, and in its progress swept away *Christian*, together with *Heathen*, states and empires. It continues also to this day ; shorn, indeed, of much of its splendour and renown, but still upholding the authority of the Koran over an incalculable extent of territory. This is a proud theme for the infidel historian. “ If,” says he, “ you allege the success of the Gospel as a testimony to the truth of Jesus, how refuse the same testimony in honour of the prophet of Mecca ? ”

We answer, Bring your Prophet to the same *test* that we apply to Jesus and his Apostles, and instantly the parallelism vanishes. If success be only *then* a *certain* evidence of Divine favour when it is accompanied with some *other* criterion of its truth, when it does not supersede the *investigation* of other proofs, or when it is such as cannot rationally be ac-

counted for as the work of mere *human* agents,—then we affirm, that, in all these respects, instead of *parallelism* between the two cases, it is impossible to produce a stronger *contrast* than the respective parties exhibit the one to the other. The Arabian produced no voucher but the *sword*:—and is it a “strange thing” that the sword should make proselytes? Or did this resemble the policy of HIM who warned his followers, that “they who took the sword should perish by the sword^a?” Mahomet interdicted *inquiry* into the truths of the Koran, and demanded implicit credence in its manifold inconsistencies and contradictions. Did *this*, again, resemble the Teacher who said, “Be ready always to “give a reason of the hope that is in you^b?” Mahomet ministered to the most corrupt propensities of his countrymen, by allowing every *voluptuous* indulgence they could crave. Shall *this* too be brought into parallel with the apostolical maxim, “Every one that hath this “hope in him purifieth himself, even as He “is pure^c?”—But why pursue the comparison?—Upon the principles by which every such question must be tried, if success be deemed a token, in the one case, of *Divine*

^a Matt. xxvi. 52.^b 1 Pet. iii. 15.^c 1 John iii. 3.

support, because that success was obtained in opposition to human power and human corruption, and because it was accompanied with the highest supernatural testimonies that could be borne to it;—does it not, in the other case, shew itself to have been the entire work of *man's* device, because effected by the aid of every weapon of carnal warfare, and sanctioned by no one unequivocal testimony of higher authority?

But let us now descend from these more conspicuous subjects of contrast, to others not unconnected with them, though of inferior magnitude—the progress of *Popery* and of the *Protestant Reformation*.

If the Almighty hath manifestly interposed to prosper such a work as the Christian Revelation, against the combined efforts of Jews, Turks, Heathens, and Infidels, it may without presumption be expected, that his providence will still farther be watchful over it, to uphold it against such *corruption* or *perversion* as might otherwise frustrate the purpose for which it was bestowed. But if the *external* circumstances of religion be permitted to form the *sole* criterion of our judgment on this point, how shall we gainsay the triumphs of the *Romish Church* in the ascendancy she so long enjoyed throughout almost

the whole western empire, and which she still enjoys to such an extent, as not to hesitate in appropriating to herself the title of the *Catholic* or *Universal* Church?

Well aware of the specious and imposing nature of this argument, Bellarmine and other distinguished champions of the see of Rome enumerate, among the essential characters of the true Church, its amplitude, its duration, and its temporal prosperity; tokens, it must be confessed, sufficiently discernible in the history of the papal power. But if all or either of these be necessary to certify us of the Divine favour, what shall we say of the condition of the whole Christian Church in its primitive state, before it obtained any countenance from the secular powers, and whilst it laboured under almost continual persecution? And, on the other hand, if these, when they do concur, are sure and certain tokens of the true Church, without any appeal to other evidence; may not the disciples of *Mahomet* lay claim to the same distinction? For whatever of amplitude, duration, or temporal prosperity, even in her proudest days, papal Rome might boast, will, perhaps, without difficulty, be paralleled in more than one epoch of Saracen or of Ottoman power.

What *other* tokens, then, has the Church of Rome to produce, as concurrent evidence of her exclusive possession of the Divine favour; more especially when brought into comparison with those Protestant communities which have renounced her usurpation? We know, indeed, her claim to supremacy, by virtue of her descent from St. Peter; her assumption also of the power of miracles; and her boast of retaining many articles of Christian faith and worship which the rest of the Christian world disclaim. But these pretensions have been too often canvassed and refuted, to be admitted as grounds of that preeminence in the Divine favour, of which she deems her external greatness to be so indubitable a proof. Nor are we at any loss to account for the utmost extent of that greatness, or the influence it has had upon so vast a portion of Christendom, when we contemplate the means and resources which were for ages employed in maturing its designs. In these we discover such abundance of *human* policy, of subtilty, ingenuity, fraud, and force, as will sufficiently solve the problem, without having recourse to higher agency: and until the historical evidence on which this solution of it rests can be set aside, few impartial observers will incline to think the

mere *success* of popery a proof that it is the work of God.

But, it will be asked, on what better grounds do we assert such a claim in favour of the Protestant Reformation?—On grounds, we apprehend, too strong to be removed by any such objections as lie against the pretensions just examined.

We allege, in the first place, the success of Protestantism *against* that prodigious weight of *human* machinery by which the papal power had been maintained; and which was employed to the very utmost for the overthrow of this extraordinary enterprise. We see the leaders of this enterprise struggling continually under the greatest difficulties and discouragements, exposed to the rage of malice and the storm of persecution. In their labours and distresses we discover much that reminds us of what the primitive Christians underwent in their struggle with Jewish bigotry and heathen violence. Under such circumstances, *success* in the attempt carries with it, we conceive, something strongly indicating the aid of an invisible and all-powerful hand. The external means appear so inadequate to the exigencies of the case, the instruments so incompetent to effect the purpose, without the interposition of an over-

ruling Providence, that we feel almost constrained to say, more than mortal strength must have been engaged in the transaction.

But we should deem even this argument insufficient to establish the point in question, were it not corroborated by more decisive evidence. That the Protestant reformation prospered through the Divine blessing, we infer from the character of the work itself, as well as from its result. Its features are those of truth and purity; of truth, recovered, after the lapse of ages, from the genuine stores of Scripture and primitive antiquity; of purity, not rejecting the comely and venerable externals of religion, but retaining such only as befit its holy character, and are in no wise repugnant to scriptural or apostolical authority. Contrasted, in these respects, with the Church which it renounced, it bears the character of an undaunted champion of the genuine, simple "faith, once delivered to the "saints^e," against the corrupt abettors of idolatrous superstitions. It stands forth, the advocate of the written word, against those who would have made it almost of none effect by their unwritten and unauthorized traditions. It comes forward, in the panoply of apostolical truth, to vindicate that main foundation

^e Jude 3.

of the Christian's hope, salvation by Christ alone, against those who had taught men to build their hopes upon other mediators and intercessors, or upon the fallacious ground of human merit. In these respects it exhibits credentials of its Divine original, totally different from the pretensions of that power to which it stands opposed.

Should it, however, be objected, that the Reformation was, in some countries, and especially in our own, considerably aided and promoted by the interested views of secular potentates, jealous of pontifical authority, and desirous to throw off its yoke; it may be answered, that these had, at most, but a partial and temporary operation, with reference to the general result, and bore but little proportion to the prodigious extent and magnitude of the undertaking, and the obstacles to be surmounted. Let it also be observed, that in the *commencement*, at least, of the work, little or no aid of this kind can be traced. Yet the Divine blessing was manifest in the antecedent circumstances of its birth and origin, no less than in its ulterior progress. Long before Popery had attained its zenith, faithful witnesses in various parts of Christendom bore testimony against its encroachments and its corruptions. Remnants of the

purest primitive Churches stedfastly resisted its persuasions and its threats. Individuals occasionally dared to appeal against it, even in the plenitude of its power. Whole communities from time to time endured its most sanguinary hostility, rather than embrace its terms of communion. So frequent were these efforts in the cause of truth, as to warrant us in affirming, that God “never left Himself “without witness,” in this respect as in others, of His superintending watchfulness over the work of His own hands. So that, however unblessed by temporal prosperity, if amplitude and duration are indications of the Divine favour, the Protestant faith needs not shrink from the test, when applied with due regard to its comparative means and circumstances.

Here, then, we might terminate the inquiry, were nothing further intended than simply to illustrate the maxim of the text, and to shew by what rules, and under what necessary restrictions and limitations, it is to be applied to specific cases. But the subject is of too great interest, and too fertile of observations which may be found to have some bearing upon the present state of religion among us, to be thus cursorily dismissed. History, indeed, furnishes so many instances

of the proneness of men, of every time and country, to mistake the nature of the maxim, or to misapply it ; and the consequences hence resulting have been oftentimes so injurious, that we can hardly exercise too great caution, lest it be made an encouragement to hazardous or doubtful speculations. I shall therefore postpone to the next opportunity some additional elucidations of the subject, together with a summary application of the whole to the existing circumstances in which we ourselves are placed.

One observation, however, may here be subjoined, affecting the main principle of the whole inquiry. The maxim, "If this work be
"of men, it will come to nought ; but if it be
"of God, ye cannot overthrow it," may seem, when applied to the case of revealed religion, to appeal to an issue which cannot be absolutely decided till time shall be no more. For if the period could ever arrive when Christianity should be universally rejected, and some other system of religion universally established in its place, the obvious inference would be, according to the implied tenor of this rule, that it was "not of God." This, however, only serves to shew still more clearly, (what it has been the object of this present discourse to establish,) that some *other* rule

must be brought to *cooperate* with this for the determination of the main question. It is, indeed, as clear and certain a maxim of sound reason, that God cannot contradict himself, as it is that He cannot support falsehood, or forsake truth. If, therefore, a religion professing to come from God has all those marks and tokens about it which may reasonably satisfy us that it is His work; and if it has, moreover, hitherto maintained its ground under the most adverse circumstances, and against the most formidable opposition of human power; then (as was before suggested) its perpetuity and final success may be safely anticipated; since this expectation rests, not only upon the same assurance as its first general reception and propagation, but also on the credit of the Divine promise vouchsafed to that effect, and guaranteed by what has already been accomplished of its declared purpose. And here it is, that so broad a line of distinction may be observed between Christianity and every system opposed to it, in the one case; and between pure Christianity and every corrupt system of it, in the other. We do not assume the truth of Christianity, solely because it has maintained its ground for more than 1800 years; nor do we assume the purity of any Protestant pro-

fession of it, solely because it has supplanted Popery and established itself in its stead. But we conclude both Christianity and Protestantism to have been largely favoured with the Divine blessing and protection, because they have both thriven under the greatest possible difficulties and dangers ; and because they can both produce testimonies of their truth and Divine authority, which would sufficiently demonstrate their origin, even if they had never emerged from their pristine state of adversity and depression.

Thus far, then, we have proceeded in endeavouring to rest upon its proper foundation one very important support of religious truth. The more effectually this is established upon solid grounds, the more confidently may we build our hopes of the good ultimately to result from it : and the more patiently may we await that final triumph of faith and holiness, when “ every plant which “ our heavenly Father hath not planted, shall “ be rooted up^f,” and “ every tree which bring- “ eth not forth good fruit, shall be hewn down “ and cast into the fire^g.” Now, &c.

^f Matt. xv. 13.

^g Matt. vii. 19.

SERMON III.

ACTS v. 38, 39.

If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it.

CONFIDENCE in the Divine support gives to truth one of its best encouragements. It supplies strength under adverse circumstances, and it contributes to the purest enjoyment of prosperity. When heightened also by the perceptible progress and advancement of the work that is undertaken, it operates as the most powerful of all incitements to exertion and perseverance; fortifying the mind with a full persuasion, that the cause is acceptable both to God and man.

But how is this confidence to be attained? How shall a just and rational assurance of the Divine blessing be distinguished from vain pretensions to it, the offspring of delusion or deceit? How shall we effectually check the sanguine expectations and the arrogant boastings of weak, or sometimes of wicked men, who

make *success* the criterion of their deserts? Or how, on the other hand, shall we “comfort “the feeble-minded^a,” when even that which they may reasonably believe to be the work of God refuses to prosper in their hands?

In a former discourse on the words of the text, an attempt has been made to remove this difficulty, by shewing on what foundation the maxim it contains must be supposed to rest, and under what limitations it is necessarily to be understood, when applied as a test of religious truth. Instances were alleged, to prove that *success* affords a collateral rather than a direct argument of the truth of any religious system; and that it presupposes some *other* evidences, sufficient to warrant us in ascribing that success to Divine agency. The rule, therefore, was shewn to be misapplied, when it is made to supersede the investigation of other concurrent proofs; when it is urged upon slight or insufficient grounds; and when sufficient discrimination is not made between what is within the ordinary reach of human ability, and what is manifestly beyond its reach. These observations were illustrated by reference to the contrast betwixt Christianity and Mahometanism, and to a similar contrast betwixt Popery and the

^a 1 Thess. v. 14.

Protestant Reformation. In each case it was shewn that the success of truth on the one side, and the success of falsehood and of corruption on the other, could not easily be confounded by discriminating and impartial observers :—that, on the side of truth the indications of Divine interposition, independently of the prosperous result, were too conspicuous to be overlooked ; while the circumstances which led to the successful issue were, in many respects, at war with human strength and policy :—that, on the side of falsehood and corruption, not only were these concurrent testimonies of Divine favour wanting, but so manifest and so potent were the engines of human warfare employed in upholding them, that we need seek no higher causes to account for the result.

Some additional elucidations of the subject, together with a summary application of the whole to the present state of religion among us, remain now to be brought forward.

And first it may be worthy of observation, that the argument from the *success* of the Gospel seems not to have been much insisted upon by the sacred writers themselves, except as connected with the evidence of *miracles* and of *prophecy*. It is never obtruded upon their opponents as the result of Divine inter-

position, unless with reference to tokens of a different kind, which could not be ascribed to any other cause.

Thus when Peter and John, and the rest of the disciples, astonished at the great accession of converts which flowed in at the very beginning of their ministry, applied to the event the Psalmist's prophetic declaration concerning the Messiah's kingdom, "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing^b?"—this triumphant expression of exultation was uttered in consequence of a signal miracle just wrought by these two Apostles; to which miracle they had appealed, in proof that God was with them: and their exultation was accompanied with fervent prayer for further manifestations of the same kind. Again; when St. Luke observes, "So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed^c," it is immediately after relating the "special miracles which had been done by Paul^d." St. Paul himself also states the real cause of this success, and goes to the root of the question before us, when he says, that "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty^e;"

^b Psalm ii. 1.

^c Acts xix. 20.

^d Acts xix. 11.

^e 1 Cor. i. 27.

and again, in that very remarkable expression, “the weakness of God is stronger than men^f.” He ascribes it to miraculous power, when he elsewhere speaks of God as “bearing witness” to the Apostles “with signs and wonders, and “with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy “Ghost^g.” He points it out also as the fulfilment of *prophecy*, by referring to the predictions of David and of Isaiah, that “their “sound went into all the earth, and their “words unto the end of the world^h.”

This, indeed, is a most prominent and striking feature in the case of Christianity, that its success, however unlikely to be effected by human means, was expressly *foretold* by the ancient Jewish prophets, as well as by our Lord himself. It was foretold, that “a “little one should become a thousand, and a “small one a strong nationⁱ,” that it should “be exalted above the hills, and all nations “should flow unto it^k,” and that “all the “ends of the earth should see the salvation “of God^l.” Very numerous are the predictions to this effect in the Old Testament, and very explicit are the declarations that this should be the result, in opposition to the most formidable adversaries.

^f 1 Cor. i. 25.

^g Heb. ii. 4.

^h Rom. x. 18.

ⁱ Isaiah lx. 22.

^k Isaiah ii. 2.

^l Isaiah lii. 10.

Our Lord himself no less distinctly announced its rapid and extensive propagation, in the parable of the “grain of mustard seed, which “is the least of all seeds; but when it is “grown is the greatest among herbs, and be- “cometh a tree, so that the birds of the air “come and lodge in the branches thereof^m.” Its rising also out of obscurity, and by means inexplicable to human sagacity, he illustrates by saying, it is “as if a man should cast seed “into the ground, and should sleep, and the “seed should spring and grow up he knoweth “not howⁿ.” Yet he distinctly forewarns his disciples that such should be the strife and persecution it would occasion, as to make it appear that he had “come, not to send peace “on the earth, but a sword^o :” that his disciples should be “hated of all men for his “name’s sake^p ;” that “many should be of- “fended, and betray one another, and hate “one another^q ;” and yet, notwithstanding this, that it was “built upon a rock,” and the “gates of hell should not prevail against it^r.”

It is impossible not to perceive in these representations a most lively picture of what afterwards came to pass, in the peculiar circumstances attending the first promulgation

^m Matt. xiii. 32.

ⁿ Mark iv. 26, 27.

^o Matt. x. 34.

^p Matt. x. 22.

^q Matt. xxiv. 10.

^r Matt. xvi. 18

of the Gospel. Christianity is the only religion which has ever thus thriven under long-continued and almost unintermitting persecution. It is also the only religion of which such success, under such circumstances, had ever been distinctly foretold. Here lies the main force of the argument. On this the sacred writers ground their appeal to its success in proof of its Divine authority. Their successors did the same. The primitive apologists for Christianity, during the three first centuries, make no vain boastings upon this evidence in its behalf; but simply state it as the necessary result of those supernatural occurrences, which sufficiently spake for themselves to the common understandings of mankind, and which would have entitled it to acceptance, however obstinately it might be resisted by any combination of human exertions.

Not such was the case with its heathen opponents. When persecution triumphed for a while over the banner of the cross, Pagan rulers were ever forward to assert the pre-eminence of their gods, and to rely upon this evidence, that their cause was the cause of Heaven. But no sooner did a reverse take place, than their confidence in these imaginary divinities was lost; and Christians were reproached with being the cause that

the gods deserted their temples, and inflicted calamities on their devoted worshippers. Such was the contrast betwixt truth and falsehood ! In the one case, success was a mere bubble, visionary and unsubstantial, which at the first adverse blast burst and vanished ; in the other, being founded on a basis firm and sure, it defied the storm and tempest, and withstood the shock of whatever force could be brought against it.

Similar boasting, when favoured by temporal prosperity, we have already observed to be characteristic of the false religion of Mahomet, and of the corrupt system of Christianity forced upon the acceptance of mankind by the Church of Rome. We have also observed with how little justice either of these can assert it as a proof of the Divine favour.

Other systems, however, far less extensive and permanent in their effects than Mahometanism or Popery, have laid claim to this supposed demonstration of their truth. Whenever a heresy or a schism spread its baleful influence over any considerable portion of the Christian Church, it was seldom that it did not arrogate to itself preeminence in this respect. Thus, when *Arianism* (through the encouragement it derived from the emperor Constantine) extended far and

wide, in almost every part of the Roman empire; the circumstance was instantly applied by its advocates as an indication that it was the work of God. Constantius himself ascribed his success in war to his having embraced the Arian cause; and was so intoxicated with this persuasion, as to suffer the Arians to address him in terms of impious flattery; whilst they, on the other hand, readily availed themselves of his vain imaginations, the better to forward their views. But what was the issue? The very next emperor that succeeded uprooted all these goodly hopes, and annihilated this vain boasting, by his maintenance of the Catholic Faith against these innovators; and within no very distant period the heresy itself dwindled into insignificance, and was little known but as a tale of other times.

Nor have succeeding ages wanted examples of a similar propensity to ill-founded confidence. Many an ephemeral error has built the loftiest expectations of success upon the sudden popularity it had acquired; and has hence been led to arrogate to itself the assured support of Heaven upon very slender evidence. That this should be the case with the abettors of opinions in themselves originating in fanatical delusions, or upborne by

strong enthusiastic feelings, cannot be matter of astonishment. That the first promoters, for example, of the *Crusades*, or holy wars, should have eagerly interpreted the vast accession of numbers to their standard, and every casual advantage that subsequently occurred, to be clear and certain tokens of the Divine blessing upon their design, may be regarded as the natural result of the spirit and disposition which dictated the enterprise itself: an enterprise which excites pity, nay almost respect, for the deluded parties, notwithstanding the unjustifiable means by which it was to have been accomplished. For a similar reason, we scarcely wonder at the strange instances which ecclesiastical history presents to our observation, of the confidence with which some of the most corrupt and contemptible sects from time to time obtruded their reveries, and from their momentary effect upon credulous minds augured certain success. Witness the innumerable pretenders to preternatural inspiration and the gift of prophecy, both in earlier and later ages of the Church; such as the *Montanists* of old, and the many lesser sects which afterwards branched out from them; the *German Anabaptists* also, towards the middle of the sixteenth century, and the

multitude of fanatical parties which in the following century overthrew the government, civil and ecclesiastical, of *our own* country. In all these, no feature is more striking, none seems to have excited more implicit veneration in their followers, than that arrogance which led them first gratuitously to assume a Divine impulse as the incitement to their proceedings, and then to ground upon the too ready admission of that pretence among their followers, a further assumption of the Divine blessing upon their labours. This is almost the invariable course pursued by mere enthusiasts; and we perceive in it nothing but what is congenial to the very nature of enthusiasm, whatever may be the particular cast of opinions which it is disposed to adopt.

But it is somewhat more remarkable, and affords a still stronger proof of the extensive prevalence of self-deception, that religionists of a description the most opposite to these have been betrayed into similar mispersuasions. Even the cold and sceptical character of *Socinianism* has not secured its votaries against this temptation to vulgar credulity. Its early progress in Poland, Transylvania, and other neighbouring countries, under considerable disadvantages and discouragements, might, perhaps, be expected to elate the minds

of its first abettors. But we may well wonder that some of its more recent advocates, even in our own times, viewing the actual state of religion in this and other countries, should have permitted the very limited success of their own labours to fill them with sanguine expectations of its almost universal acceptance, at no very distant period. Yet such is the power of self-complacency upon men otherwise the most inaccessible (in their own estimation at least) to the prejudices which beset ordinary minds.

A stranger phenomenon, however, than even this, must not pass unobserved. *Infidelity* itself can take up this parable against religion when it may serve its purpose. Rebels can foretell the downfall of the State, and Atheists the ruin of the Church, with all the confidence of a prophetic impulse: and when the work of disorder and mischief seems to prosper in their hands, who more ready than they to appeal, with unblushing effrontery, to this token of the will of Heaven? Need we search the records of ancient times in proof of this? Need we go further back than within the period of our own recollection, or even than the present moment, for examples which too plainly attest it? How did the French revolutionists triumph in this pre-

tended manifestation of the goodness of their cause! and how loudly did the usurper who snatched the reins of empire from their hands assert this as his warrant from the throne of Heaven! And are there not, even now, among ourselves, those who shew their readiness to urge the same pretensions, whenever they for a moment obtain an imaginary triumph over the laws and sacred institutions of their country?

What has been said in this and the preceding Discourse tends to confirm a just and wise observation of an eminent Divine of our Church¹, that “success is one of those common-place arguments which is made much too free with by every party, and for every cause:—and no one,” he adds, “need be told how frequently it hath been abused, with a design to create in men a belief, that God approves those actions and designs which he is sometimes pleased to permit and prosper.”

There is, indeed, scarcely any species of proof brought forward in support of truth, of which falsehood has not some counterfeit prepared, to deceive the unwary. Whether it be miracles, prophecy, inspiration, or any other indication of Divine agency, the adversary

¹ Dr. South.

seldom fails to set up some plausible tokens of a similar kind. Among these, none, perhaps, has been so frequently resorted to, as an appeal to the *success* of any religious persuasion in attestation of its truth. The complex nature of the argument, to render it a test of truth, is seldom sufficiently considered ; and hence it seems to have arisen, that the real value of *this* kind of proof has been either unduly depreciated by sceptics and unbelievers, or rashly and unwarrantably magnified, in order to subserve the purposes of enthusiasm and imposture.

As a satisfactory evidence of the Divine support given to *Christianity* against every system hitherto opposed to it, it may (as has already been shewn) be urged with unhesitating confidence, because it stands connected with such direct and unequivocal tokens of supernatural interposition, as cannot be set aside without detracting from the attributes and perfections of God himself. As an evidence also in support of the pure faith of *Protestant Churches*, contrasted with the corruptions of the see of Rome, or with any other departure from primitive Christianity ; although it assumes a somewhat different aspect, it is still substantially the same. Protestantism, indeed, pretends not to actually miracu-

lous interposition in its behalf, but it makes a direct appeal to that primitive standard of faith and worship which was itself miraculously sanctioned; and it builds its claim to acceptance, not solely on the apparent inadequacy of human means to effect the result produced, but still more on its entire concurrence with that which had already, in times past, given manifold proofs of its Divine origin. This appears to have been the view generally taken by the reformers themselves. Even Luther, whose temper was sufficiently ardent, and his confidence of success proportionably sanguine, thus modestly expresses his sentiments respecting his own *new* doctrines, as they were then deemed to be. “If “the work,” says he, “be not of God, I do “not pretend that it should be mine; let “it come to nothing, and be claimed by no “one. I ought to seek nothing else than “that I should not be the occasion of error “to any one¹.” This memorable sentiment

¹ “Idcirco mei non oblitus, his verbis protestor, Me disputare, non determinare. Disputo, inquam, non assero, “ac disputo cum timore. Non quod eorum bullas et minas “timeam, qui, nullo prorsus timore tacti, quicquid vel somniaverint, velut Evangelium credi volunt. Horum enim “audacia et inscitia simul coegit, fateor, etiam timori meo “non credere; quæ nisi tanta esset, nullus me præterquam “angulus meus cognovisset. *Si opus ipsum non fuerit*

was delivered at a time when almost by his own single exertions, his opinions had spread with great rapidity, and were received with much applause by a large body of his fellow-countrymen. Yet it clearly shews that he by no means considered the extraordinary prevalence or popularity of his opinions sufficient in itself to establish their foundation in truth. There is, indeed, abundant proof that he as well as the rest of the reformers, grounded their assurance of the Divine approbation of the work they had taken in hand, upon far higher principles. They founded it on their adherence to Scripture, and to “the faith once delivered to the saints;” and whatever confidence they expressed in the issue of their labours, sprang from that holy and unexceptionable source, not from any blind and presumptuous expectation of the interposition of Heaven.

It were well if the same temperate and judicious conduct still characterized all who profess to follow in their steps. Nor will this caution be deemed unnecessary by those who

“suum, omnino volo ut nec sit meum; sit vero nihil et nullius. Ego nihil debui querere, nisi ut nulli essem erroris occasio.” Epistola D. H. Sculteto, Eccl. Brandenburg. Episc. anno 1518. Oper. edit. Jenæ, tom. I. pp. 63, 64.—See Bower’s Life of Luther, 1813. pp. 56—59.

attentively observe some striking features of the present times. We live in a busy spirit-stirring age. Great plans of good, as well as of evil, are on foot. The efforts of the ill-disposed to bereave us of religion itself, and, with it, of all that is worth possessing, are met by no less strenuous efforts, on the part of the pious and well-intentioned, not only to resist these aggressions, but to meliorate the condition of mankind in general, by spreading wider and wider the blessings of Revelation. To give unbounded extent to the work of Christian education; to promote the universal knowledge of the word of God; and to send the glad tidings of the gospel into the remotest corners of the earth; these are the enlarged designs of Christian benevolence in which we are now continually called upon to co-operate.

That such designs are highly worthy of a Christian country so distinguished as ours, is unquestionable; and that the objects to which they are directed are acceptable in the sight of God, it is equally impossible to doubt. Yet even here a word of admonition may not be unseasonable, to the projectors and promoters of these great purposes; lest they should be overheated by the ebullitions of zeal and applause which their own active exertions have

excited, and too readily augur, from the popularity and rapid progress of their undertakings, an almost absolute certainty of Divine co-operation.

Let it be observed, then, that before we venture to assure ourselves of the Divine blessing even upon the best undertakings, we ought to be assured, not only of the good we intend, but also, that the means to be employed are unexceptionable. And before we presume to allege the apparent success of our labours in proof that such a blessing attends them, we should be able satisfactorily to shew that we are not departing from any known line of duty, in the proceedings by which the purpose is to be accomplished.

In the great work of spreading the knowledge of Christianity among mankind;—whether it be by training the infant mind, by extending the circulation of the Scriptures, or by preaching the gospel to the unconverted;—care is requisite, that we do not, by an indiscriminate use of the means put into our hands, endanger that which it is our object to promote. To inculcate truth, and to reject error, are in fact correlative duties; nor can the one be effectually performed, without attending to the other. It becomes therefore a grave and momentous considera-

tion, in all religious designs, that they be framed and conducted upon such principles as are best calculated to exclude error, as well as to disseminate truth. To act solely upon the impulse of religious zeal, or of an ardent philanthropy, without due regard to this consideration, is to blind the judgment where its power of discernment is most wanted, and to overlook the contingent evils that may arise, in the contemplation of the good that is pursued. For should it be found, that, by too largely generalizing some of these plans, and subjecting them to no restrictions or modifications, opportunity is afforded to introduce corrupt and erroneous views of religion;—should it be found also, that by relinquishing the salutary restraints of ecclesiastical order and discipline, occasion is given to weaken the outworks of Christianity itself, and an opening made for the inroads of a factious and disorganizing spirit;—the injuries thus accruing cannot but be a formidable counterpoise to the benefits actually produced, however great and valuable those benefits would otherwise be. Nor will any prospect of success, under such circumstances, be sufficient to assure us that the work is of God, and is prospered by His blessing.

Happily, however, in every great purpose

of Christian charity and Christian edification, it is practicable for members of our own Church, to pursue these objects without incurring such hazards; and to cherish a pious confidence in the Divine blessing, without yielding to presumptuous imaginations. They who, upon deliberate conviction, are attached to our communion, can hardly but deem it desirable, if not indispensable, that religious instruction should be conveyed to others through that channel from which they themselves have imbibed it. They can hardly doubt, that in conveying it through that channel, they are doing the work of God in the most acceptable manner, and with the fairest prospect of a successful issue. For as Christianity itself has stood the test which Gamaliel applied to it, and has come out from the ordeal with additional lustre; so it is not, perhaps, too much to affirm, that the Church to which we belong may well abide a similar scrutiny. The faithful page of history bears witness to its high estimation, in past and in present times, throughout the Christian world. Its conflicts and its victories, its perils and its deliverances, its recovered purity of faith and worship after the lapse of many ages, and its subsequent rescue from the hands of sectarian violence, are well-authen-

ticated evidences that it has had its full share of that heavenly favour and benediction promised to the universal Church by its divine Founder.

Upon this basis, then, it becomes us to build every pious and charitable design for the edification of others or of ourselves. Nor is it a narrow and exclusive spirit of bigotry which dictates the necessity of thus regulating our plans and operations. A sense of that necessity arises naturally from the true and ardent love of pure Christianity itself, which must ever make us desirous of extending its benefits to mankind in general, with the least possible risk of its being intermingled with baser matter. Restrained only by this salutary consideration, let the Christian philanthropist enlarge his measures and his means to the utmost possible extent. Let him not, with a niggard spirit, hoard the treasure for himself alone, or for those immediately around him, but rejoice when opportunity is offered him, with any well-grounded hope of success, to carry on the work of his Redeemer, by promoting "glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men."

Great is the encouragement, great the confidence which, when thus regulated and con-

trolled, our hope of the Divine support will unceasingly afford us. The manifest tokens vouchsafed by the Almighty, in all ages of the world, that the work which is really His shall ultimately prosper in His hands, will lead us, first, carefully to examine whether it be indeed His work in which we are engaged, and then resolutely to persevere in it, by means as pure and righteous as the end to be attained, in full assurance of the divine co-operation. This is neither fanaticism nor presumption. This gives no warrant to error, however widely propagated, or eagerly received, to boast of its achievements; neither does it discourage truth, however menaced, or for a while depressed. The appeal is made, not to a fallible and often misjudging world; not to human policy, strength, or numbers; but to a Judge infallible, omniscient, and omnipotent;—to Him who can bring light out of darkness, and strength out of weakness;—to Him who hath given to his Church the assurance, “Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world;” and the promise, that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

SERMON IV.

2 TIM. ii. 23.

But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.

THE caution here given by St. Paul to Timothy is thrice repeated, with some variety of phrase, in the course of the two short Epistles addressed to him. In the beginning of the First Epistle^a he exhorts him not to “give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than “godly edifying which is in faith.” In the latter end of the same Epistle^b he admonishes him to withdraw from those who are “proud, knowing nothing, but doting about “questions and strifes of words;” and to avoid “profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science, falsely so called.” In this Second Epistle^c, besides the caution in

^a 1 Tim. i. 4. ^b 1 Tim. vi. 4, 20. ^c 2 Tim. ii. 16.

the text, he again enjoins Timothy to “shun “profane and vain babblings.” In his Epistle to Titus also^d we meet with a similar injunction; “Avoid foolish questions, and “genealogies, and contentions, and strivings “about the Law; for they are unprofitable “and vain.”

There can be no doubt that St. Paul saw especial occasion for these reiterated admonitions, at the time when these Epistles were written: and much labour has been expended by the learned in ecclesiastical antiquity, in endeavouring to ascertain what kind of questions these might be which the Apostle was so desirous to discountenance. This it has not been found easy to determine, since the several epithets by which St. Paul characterises such questions are applicable to very many subjects of disputation; and although Timothy and Titus doubtless well understood to what particular controversies they had reference, conjecture must now supply the place of direct proof or evidence, as to their specific application. The remarkable expressions used by the Apostle may, however, serve to throw some light upon this inquiry. The “fables and endless genealogies” refer, perhaps, to the fabulous inventions of

^d Titus iii. 9.

heathen poets and philosophers, respecting the origin of their deities; inventions, which seem to have given rise to many of those extravagant notions concerning the attributes and the emanations of the Godhead, which distinguished the Gnostics of that and the succeeding age, and were afterwards adopted by Jewish teachers in their systems of cabalistic theology. These, being altogether visionary speculations, and resting on no certain *data* of faith or science, the Apostle might well denominate ἀπαιδέυτους ζητήσεις, uninformative or unedifying researches, researches unconnected with sound learning of any kind, unprofitable, and vain. With equal truth might they also be called “profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science, falsely so called.” And whether the censure was directed against the Gnostics, or against the Judaizing converts of that day, is now comparatively a matter of little moment.

But probably we shall not be far from the truth, if we suppose that St. Paul, in his general censure of “foolish and unlearned questions,” intended to comprehend other prevailing errors, as well as these, both among the Jewish and the Gentile converts. When he deprecated “contentions and strivings

“about the *law*,” he might have the *Jewish* controversies more immediately in view. When he directed his admonitions against “profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of *science* falsely so called,” he might advert to some frequent topics of disquisition in the schools of *Heathen* philosophy. And when he reprobated, without any such specific description, “strifes of words” and “perverse disputings,” we may conceive the reproof to attach to all, of whatever sect or denomination, who availed themselves of verbal obscurities or ambiguities, to promote error and dissension.

Without further inquiry, therefore, into these local or temporary circumstances, the Apostle’s admonition may be applied to discountenance frivolous and unedifying controversies of whatever kind, and thus to cut off one of the most fertile sources of heresy and contention. By controversies of this description, Christianity has been too often unnecessarily exposed to obloquy; and the strength of her best advocates has not unfrequently been wasted in maintaining positions, which, if not indefensible, were yet not worth the sacrifices which the defence required. With these evils, the friends as well as the adversaries of the truth have perhaps

been in no small degree chargeable, although the far greater portion of them has doubtless originated with those in whom no reverential regard for the sacred oracles appears to have operated, to restrain their perverse or exuberant imaginations.

I proceed, then, in the more general application of this subject, to consider the questions which we are here instructed to avoid as reducible to three distinct classes, comprising, *first*, those which involve points neither within the reach of our natural faculties, nor made known to us by Divine revelation; *secondly*, those which, whether or not they may be capable of satisfactory decision, are yet in their kind unprofitable and unimportant; *thirdly*, those which relate to verbal, not substantial differences, arising from some misunderstanding or misapplication of the terms used by the respective parties in their several topics of contention. The first of these classes will sufficiently occupy our attention for the present.

Far the greater part of the questions belonging to this class may justly be called “both foolish and unlearned;” foolish, because they admit not of a definitive answer; unlearned, because inquiry into that which no human learning can fathom, and which reve-

lation has not disclosed, can never lead to the acquisition of real knowledge.

Every one who is well instructed in revealed religion must be aware that there are certain boundaries of knowledge which God himself appears to have prescribed to the human intellect; that many things are revealed in his word purely as matters of faith, not of scientific investigation; and that, with respect to these, so long as we continue in our present state, we must be content to "know in part," and to "see through a glass darkly." Upon such subjects it is both our duty and our wisdom, not to indulge in more abstruse or sublime contemplations than we can attempt with safety, and with a reasonable prospect of success.

The temptation nevertheless is great, to men of superior mental endowments, to seek the reputation of being able to penetrate further than others into the depths of mystery, and to evince their acuteness, either by endeavouring to explain, or (if that be above their strength) to perplex and invalidate those doctrines, which the more modest inquirer is content to receive by faith, without asking for demonstrations, of which they are not susceptible. This spirit being once roused, and questions being started of a new and

subtle kind, which give scope to a display of talents and ingenuity, antagonists will not long be wanting, of no less ardour and self-confidence, to enter the lists; and so long as vanity is on either side the governing propensity, the encounter will probably be fierce and obstinate; nor will either party be disposed to concede aught, where concession might be construed into an acknowledgment of defeat. The utmost exertions will be made to overpower the rival opponents, whatever may be the results with regard to the interests of truth.

Questions of this description not only thus operate in "gendering strifes" for the sake of victory rather than of truth, but are also in their very nature more fitted to raise disputes, than those which relate to subjects nearer to the level of our apprehensions. Darkness, not light, is favourable to the increase of perplexity and confusion. That which admits of an appeal to the evidence of sense, of experience, or of any certain principles on which to ground an opinion, may be brought to some conclusive issue. But that which cannot be submitted to any such test may be again and again debated, without any nearer approach to decision. Now, of this kind are some of the most important truths

of revealed religion: truths no farther made known to us, than is necessary to enable us to become "wise unto salvation;" beyond which salutary purpose, we have nothing to guide our steps but vague conjectures from obscure and remote analogies, or the still more vague suggestions of a fruitful imagination. Here no bounds can be set to a daring and restless spirit of curiosity. Hypothesis upon hypothesis may be raised; theory upon theory be constructed; and matters undetermined, nay unmentioned, in holy writ, may be argued upon the most groundless surmises. Revelation itself will in such cases too often be compelled to submit to the usurped authority of human conceit. The conflicting parties will be more and more eagerly engaged, and become more obstinate and untractable, in proportion as they both renounce the authority of any superior power to arbitrate between them.

The evidence of ecclesiastical history will fully bear us out in these assertions.

In the heresies of the apostolic age there appears to have been much of that disputatious spirit, and of those false pretensions to knowledge, which the apostle condemns in the words of the text. The censures bestowed upon them by the inspired teachers

of the gospel indicate that they originated, for the most part, in an overweening pride of intellect, and in presumptuous attempts to adapt the sublimest mysteries of revelation to the crude conceptions of inflated minds. In this respect, the heresies the apostles had to contend with were but prototypes of those which the advocates of unadulterated truth have in later times had occasion to combat.

What St. Paul says of heathen philosophers before the coming of Christ, that “professing “themselves to be wise they became fools^e,” is no less applicable to all disputants of this description. That is false wisdom which dogmatizes upon things inscrutable by human faculties; which frames to itself theories of spiritual and divine truth, without evidence to support them; which sets up some device of its own to be the criterion of what is proposed purely as an article of *faith*. The more such pretended knowledge is cultivated, the more manifold will be the errors resulting from it. The misapplication, indeed, of knowledge of any kind in things finite and within the reach of our natural perceptions, to subjects in their nature infinite and inaccessible to those perceptions, is no better than actual ignorance; nay, it is worse than simple ignorance, be-

^e Rom. i. 22.

cause it precludes the benefit which might otherwise be derived from that most valuable of all instruction, which is grounded exclusively upon Divine authority.

We cannot have stronger proof of this, than in the many errors which have prevailed respecting the Scripture-doctrines of the Trinity and our Lord's Incarnation. If any truths may properly be said to transcend the reach of human faculties, they are these. We can form no abstract conception of them; nor can we by any analogy, any comparison of them with objects of the visible world, attain to a more perfect acquaintance with them than is conveyed in the simple declarations of holy writ—declarations, which profess not to give us any insight into the *mode* of being essential to the Godhead, or of its union with human nature in the person of our Lord; but require us to receive both doctrines, on the sole authority of Divine testimony. Whatever questions, relating to either of them, have *more* in view than this, fall under the description of those which the apostle censures. They cannot advance real knowledge; they can only serve the purpose of contentious disputation.

The doctrine of the Trinity presents, it must be confessed, insuperable difficulties to

them who attempt to fathom its mystery. But they are not, in general, difficulties arising out of any inherent obscurity or ambiguity in the terms by which the doctrine is propounded in holy writ ; but, difficulties, for the most part, of a physical or metaphysical kind, springing from a contemplation of the subject in some point of view not presented to us by the scriptures. Similar difficulties to these (it has often been observed) occur, even in what relates to our own nature and essence. Who can explain how the human mind, in the same instant of time, and apparently by one and the same act, exercises the distinct faculties of perception, judgment, and will ? Yet who will question the fact ? And the same may be said of many other phenomena of the human mind. If then, in matters of which we ourselves are personally conscious, so much mystery be found ; how much rather may we expect that the infinity of the Divine nature should baffle our research ? Let reason first be assured that she can solve the lesser problem, before she presume to attempt the greater. Let her prove, that within her own immediate province she can disperse the clouds and darkness which surround her, before she aspire to higher flights, and lose

herself in those regions where faith alone can safely direct her course.

The desire however of philosophizing upon the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, appears to have been the main source of some of the earliest heresies. Theodoret supposes that St. Paul had Simon Magus and his followers specially in view, when he admonished Timothy to “avoid profane and vain “babblings, and oppositions of science falsely “so called^f.” What were the particular tenets of Simon Magus, it is somewhat difficult to trace, through the obscurity in which his history is involved. It appears to have been the general persuasion of antiquity, that he was a chief leader, if not the actual founder, of the multifarious tribe of Gnostics, afterwards divided and subdivided into innumerable sects. Nor is it improbable, that the wild and fantastic speculations of these pretenders to science prepared the way for subsequent heresies of a more plausible de-

^f “Qui a Simone orti sunt Gnosticos seipsos appellarunt, “quasi scientia præditos. Quæ enim divina Scriptura taut cuit, ea Deum sibi aiunt revelasse: sunt autem plena “omni impietate ac libidine. Hanc jure vocavit *falso nominatam scientiam*. Ignorationis habent caliginem, non “divinæ lucem cognitionis.” Theodoret. in locum. Oper. tom. 3. p. 493. Paris. 1642.

scription, and so much the more dangerous in their effect upon inquisitive minds. But, whether or not we can trace the chief anti-trinitarian sects to this source, we have ample evidence to prove, that, whatever differences may have subsisted between them in other respects, their errors were mostly attributable to one and the same cause, the vanity of being wise above what is written, and of endeavouring to explicate what is inexplicable by human reasoning. Hence the frequent disregard of scripture among these “perverse disputers,” when it came into competition with their own imaginations; and their rashness in making the crude conceptions of the human mind the supreme standard even of Divine truth, and the arbitrary interpreter of its sacred oracles.

Three heresiarchs of this description, passing over others of less notoriety, it may suffice to notice.

Sabellius, rather the reviver, perhaps, than the first assertor of the opinions which pass under his name, maintained, in opposition to the catholic faith, that there is no distinction of persons in the Godhead; the terms Father, Son, and Holy Ghost being nothing more than different names or titles of the Supreme Being, by which were denoted the several

manifestations of the Divine Nature in heaven and in earth; or, in other words, by which the Deity was nominally distinguished, according to his distinct operations in the redemption and sanctification of mankind. Upon this hypothesis, (for Sabellius does not appear to have denied the doctrine of the Incarnation,) it would follow, that the Father himself was united to the man Jesus, and suffered death upon the cross; whence the earlier abettors of the heresy were styled Theopaschitæ, or Patripassians, and obtained other similar denominations expressive of that confusion of the persons in the Godhead which this hypothesis seemed necessarily to imply.

Arius, seeing how totally irreconcilable this opinion was with the distinct agency ascribed to each person of the Godhead in the holy scriptures, devised the scheme of attributing to the Son an inferior species of divinity to that of the Father; reducing him to the rank of a created being, neither co-eternal, co-essential, nor co-equal with the Father; yet antecedent to all other created beings, and himself invested with the powers of the Creator. The Holy Ghost he held to have been produced by the Son, and to have cooperated with him in the work of creation,

yet inferior both to him and to the Father. This theory, while it appeared to remove some of the difficulties of Sabellianism, introduced others scarcely less insuperable. It supposed a twofold, or rather a threefold species of divinity, one uncreated, the others created; and thus recognised that sort of *polytheistic* principle, upon which some of the more subtle and refined Platonic philosophers attempted to vindicate the wild and incoherent systems of Pagan theology. Apart, however, from the unscriptural character of this hypothesis, it is encumbered with metaphysical perplexities and anomalies which its advocates have never been able to remove.

Macedonius, blending together some disjointed tenets of the two preceding systems, formed a scheme of his own, distinct from both. He agreed with Arius in acknowledging the personality of the Son, and with Sabellius in denying the personality of the Holy Ghost. To the Son he ascribed that inferior kind of divinity which the Arians, or rather the semi-Arians, maintained: the Holy Ghost he appears to have regarded only as the divine energy of the Father and the Son, not personally distinct from either. His system, therefore, involved most of the difficulties

peculiar to the others, with still less pretensions to coherency and consistency of character.

In each of these discordant schemes the vanity of human reason is more or less conspicuous. We discern in the framers of each, some fear, some reluctance, entirely to discard revelation; with a determination, at the same time, to adapt it, if possible, to certain persuasions already in possession of the mind. For, what were the questions which gave rise to these speculations? what were they, but questions originating in attempts to discover the essential nature of the Godhead, and the mode of its existence?—points, on which, the doctrine revealed in Scripture was not intended to give explicit information; and concerning which no further discoveries can possibly be made through any other channel. The main source of each error is, like that of modern Socinianism, a delusive opinion, that the most profound mystery, though propounded on the authority of Divine Revelation, is to be brought down to the level of every man's apprehension, and ought either to be rejected as incredible, or constrained, by whatever artifice of interpretation, to harmonize with the utterly incompetent decisions of human judgment.

Upon the same rock of false philosophy did other sects make shipwreck of their faith, in their speculations upon the doctrine of our Lord's *Incarnation*.

The mysterious union of the Godhead and the manhood in the person of Christ, however inexplicable by human philosophy, is perhaps scarcely more so than the union of soul and body in man himself. How mind and matter can be so intimately conjoined in our own nature, it passeth man's ingenuity to explain. Had we not the fullest assurance of the fact, we might *à priori* be led to imagine, that properties so contrary to each other as those which inhere in mind and matter, could not appertain to one and the same being without destroying its unity and its identity. The difficulty which operates to obstruct our belief of the doctrine of the Incarnation, is not in its kind dissimilar. It is the difficulty of conceiving a Being absolutely of a pure spiritual essence, and endowed with infinite perfections, to be personally united to an altogether different being;—a being compounded of a material and immaterial principle;—without any actual change, either in the one being or the other. Here human metaphysics are utterly at a stand; and if the substantial evidences

of the fact will not satisfy the incredulous or the inquisitive, we may augur but ill success from any attempts that can be made to adapt it to abstract theories.

Through attempts of this kind, however, the doctrine has been virtually, if not actually renounced, in four different ways;—by denying our Lord's divinity; by denying his human nature; by confounding their distinct properties; or by entirely disuniting them from each other.

Three of these errors sprang up in the apostolic age. The *Ebionites* asserted our Lord to have been a mere man. The *Docetæ* acknowledged his divinity, but regarded his human appearance as an illusion of the senses. *Cerinthus* and his followers seem to have felt the impossibility of disproving either his human or his divine nature; whence they framed the extravagant hypothesis, that Jesus and Christ were two distinct persons; the former simply an human being, the latter a celestial and divine Person, who entered into him at the period of his baptism, and departed from him immediately before his passion. Several passages in St. John's Epistles, as well as the opening of his Gospel, appear to have been directed against these errors; each of which, however, had some-

thing too gross in its kind to recommend itself to more refined speculators. Further subtleties, therefore, were soon invented.

The *Apollinarians* denied that Christ had a human soul; and imagined this to have been supplied by the Logos, or Divine Word, at the time of his Incarnation. They held also that the portion of the Divine Nature thus united in him underwent a change of substance from divine to human; so that the very Godhead actually suffered and died. Thus they represented him as neither perfect God nor perfect MAN; but an imperfect compound of both. They held (if we may so say) a sort of transubstantiation of a portion of the Deity into a human substance. This error was strongly in contrast with that of Cerinthus; but, like it, was too gross to obtain acceptance among the higher ranks of philosophy. Two distinguished leaders in the succeeding age displayed much superior ingenuity in remodelling these opposite schemes. These were Nestorius and Eutyches.

Nestorius is charged with having denied the actual union of the divine and human natures in the person of Christ. He appears to have considered the Logos as dwelling in Christ no otherwise than as the Holy Ghost dwelt in the Prophets and Apostles whom he

inspired ; a notion altogether inconsistent with that of the Incarnation of the Son of God, in any proper acceptation of the term, and closely bordering upon the error of Cerinthus, though divested of some of its more palpable absurdities.

Eutyches, on the other hand, refined upon the Apollinarian heresy. He is represented to have taught, that the two natures in our Lord's person were not merely united together, but were blended into one ; the human nature being entirely absorbed in the divine. According to this representation, however, he differed from Apollinaris in one respect, that the one taught a conversion of the Godhead into the manhood, the other of the manhood into the Godhead.

In each of these heresies, (supposing the tenets of the respective parties to have been fairly reported, which nevertheless is somewhat questionable,) one or other of the above-mentioned truths—the Divinity of our Lord, or his human nature, or the union of both in his person, or the proper distinction between each—is evidently impugned. Here also, as in the several anti-trinitarian hypotheses, an arrogant attempt to dogmatize upon points beyond the reach of human investigation, appears to have been the first source of error.

Questions were suggested which never ought to have been brought into discussion, and strifes were engendered which nothing could compose, so long as the parties were thus mutually disinclined to "receive with meekness" the ingrafted word."

To this wantonness of speculation, and a consequent departure from the primitive simplicity of the Christian faith, may fairly be ascribed the introduction of more extended creeds, or public professions of faith, than otherwise it might have been expedient to adopt. It is due to the character of the Christian Church in general, to state this without reserve. Until rash questions were agitated by presumptuous or turbulent spirits, and were made the occasion, not only of divisions, but of apostasies from the faith; the Church shewed no inclination to multiply articles of belief, or to burthen its members with enlarged expositions of Christian doctrine. The mere baptismal form might have sufficed as a confession of the doctrine of the Trinity; had men been content simply to recognise in that confession the mysterious union of the three Persons in the Godhead equal in majesty and honour. The bare acknowledgment that Christ was Son of God and Son of man, might have superseded any

further illustrations of the doctrine of the Incarnation, if all would have agreed in accepting those terms in their plain and obvious signification. But when refinements and subtleties were introduced, which gave a false colouring to these simple declarations, the Church would have betrayed the sacred trust committed to her, had she not fenced and guarded these doctrines by restrictive cautions and more explicit enunciations. Thus far, additions were rendered in some degree necessary; and it will not be easy to shew, that, in any public formulary generally adopted by the Catholic Church, more was done in this respect than the exigency of the case required. The Nicene Creed is in substance no more than such an expansion of the Apostles' Creed; and the Athanasian, of the Nicene. In neither of these are any new articles of faith introduced, nor even any explanation of the doctrines intended. They contain only more explicit declarations of "the faith once delivered to the saints," and a renunciation of certain errors, which, if suffered to prevail, would have rendered the whole Christian system a confused mass of discordant propositions. Whatever offence, therefore, may have been given by these enlargements of Creeds and Confessions, ought

in fairness to be charged upon those who occasioned the evil, rather than upon those who applied the remedy.

But upon other important matters of faith, as well as those which relate to the Trinity and the Incarnation, incalculable evils have arisen, from the introduction of questions equally incapable of solution by any efforts of human sagacity.

The *origin of evil* and the *corruption of human nature* are among the subjects which continually baffle the researches of presumptuous inquirers. The Scriptures certify us of the facts relating to them; of the consequences that flow from them; and of the means provided for their ultimate removal. But they afford no clue to guide us through the endless labyrinths in which we find the subjects themselves are involved, when we begin to explore them for other purposes than these. If we undertake to reconcile, to the satisfaction of every sceptical mind, even the existence of evil with the perfections of an infinitely powerful, wise, and good Being, we shall soon find ourselves stretching beyond the line of the human understanding. For this, again is not exclusively a *scriptural* difficulty;—it is not a difficulty peculiar to Christianity, or to any part of the system

of revealed religion ;—it besets every other scheme of religion as well as our own ; nay it lies as a stumbling-block in every path of philosophy. The attempt to remove it set the most ancient heathen schools at variance ; and in later days has multiplied sects among Jews, Turks, and infidels, no less than among Christians, and perhaps for the same reason ; that we can naturally know nothing of either good or evil, but on the limited scale of our own perceptions, and in the circumscribed relations we bear to the things around us ; being wholly incapable of apprehending that chain of universal being which must be ever present to the supreme Governor of the whole, and by reference to which alone the measures of his government can be duly appreciated.

Yet how many vainly-inquisitive minds have made “ shipwreck of their faith,” by embarking on this perilous ocean ! Ingrafting upon Christian truths, or rather substituting for those truths, the visionary conceits of oriental philosophy, the followers of Manes, himself a borrower from the older sects of Gnostics, spread far and wide the pestilential notion that the universe is governed by two opposite principles, the one good, the other evil, co-ordinate and co-equal, yet perpetually

at variance with each other; primary and independent sources of spirit and of matter, of light and of darkness, by whose conflicting operation this world and man himself were originally framed, in their present state of manifest imperfection. Upon this monstrous position were grounded many strange speculations concerning the nature of the Deity, the nature of man, and the person of our blessed Saviour, utterly irreconcilable with the sacred Word. A multiplicity of other sects issued from this parent source, distinguished chiefly by their respective application of the principles of their great leader to certain particular doctrines of holy writ; some corrupting the doctrine of the Incarnation, others adopting fanatical persuasions of the power of attaining to spiritual perfection by an entire abstraction of the soul from the body; others, again, rejecting large portions of sacred writ; and others even asserting the whole of the Old Testament to have been the work of the evil principle, in opposition to the New.

Another similar source of error and contention is found in the inexhaustible subject of the *Divine decrees*. This involved the various difficulties of reconciling God's foreknowledge with contingent events; the sove-

reignty of Divine grace with man's free will; the universality of the Christian redemption with the final perdition of a great portion of the human race; and numberless other questions subordinate to these, on which Scripture is silent, and unenlightened reason can tell us nothing. How injurious many of them have proved to the best interests of truth and charity, is but too well known.

Thus far may suffice respecting the *first* class of questions proposed to be considered, as properly falling under the apostolical censure in the text; questions relating to points neither within the reach of our natural faculties, nor fully made known to us by revelation. The diversity of "strange doctrines,"—doctrines unknown to the Scriptures, and even subversive of the Christian faith, which have been espoused, not only by individuals, but by entire communities of professed Christians, respecting the subjects here adverted to;—afford very striking proof of the mischiefs arising from neglect of the Apostle's salutary caution. Further evidence to the same effect may be produced when we come to the consideration of the *next* class of questions to which that caution is applicable; those which, whether or not they be really capable of satisfactory decision, are yet in

their kind unprofitable and unimportant. Between these and such as have been already noticed, such a line of distinction is requisite as may determine what greater latitude in the discussion of them can be safely allowed.

For the present, it remains only to be observed, with reference to the points already noticed, how necessary it is to bear constantly in mind that maxim of the Apostle, “We walk by faith, not by sight^a.” The mysteries which even “angels desire to look into^b ;” and which are intercepted from our view by the veil which the Almighty himself hath cast around them ; it is not for us presumptuously to explore. Questions, indeed, will sometimes occur on matters of this description, which even the most humble and diffident cannot entirely dismiss from their thoughts. But a reverential sense of the nature of the subjects, and of the immeasurable distance betwixt things finite and infinite, betwixt divine and human knowledge, will hardly fail to repress the too inquisitive spirit, and impose a salutary restraint upon the ardour of its pursuit. If enough is revealed to shew us the path of life, and if we have the full assurance of faith for all that it really concerns us to know or to believe, wherefore

^a 2 Cor. v. 7.

^b 1 Peter i. 12.

should we weary ourselves for what can profit nothing, or what may even shake our confidence in truths on which our surest hope is founded? The time, indeed, is approaching, when our aspirations after higher things may more abundantly be gratified. But it is in vain to anticipate that period. Rather will it be our wisdom to content ourselves with the lesser degree of light we already enjoy, in full assurance that “blessed are they who “have not seen, and yet have believed.”

c John xx. 29.

SERMON V.

2 TIM. ii. 23.

But foolish and unlearned questions avoid; knowing that they do gender strifes.

THERE is more difficulty than might at first be apprehended in distinguishing pretended from real knowledge, and false wisdom from that which is true. “Cease, my “son,” says Solomon, “to hear the instruction “that causeth to err from the words of knowledge^a,” and a greater than Solomon hath said, “Take heed that the light that is in thee “be not darkness^b.” St. Paul affirms that “the wisdom of this world is foolishness with “God^c,” and he speaks, in this Epistle to Timothy, of some who were “ever learning, “and never able to come to the knowledge “of the truth^d.” These admonitions imply that there may be an imposing semblance of

^a Prov. xix. 27.

^b Luke xi. 35.

^c 1 Cor. iii. 19.

^d 2 Tim. iii. 7.

knowledge and wisdom, where little is to be found that has just claims to either.

Ignorance and false wisdom are, indeed, far from being exclusively characteristic of *uncultivated* minds. The understanding may be overloaded with more than it can properly digest; or it may be supplied with that sort of instruction which vitiates, instead of improving, the mental faculty. In the former case, the effect is analogous to that of bodily repletion; in the latter, to that of poison introduced into the animal system. In both cases, the intellectual frame is weakened or disordered; and while it is so circumstanced, every accession to its stores will but add to its difficulties, or increase its dangers.

The history of the learned world, especially of that portion of it which has been occupied in theological controversies, affords but too many instances in verification of these remarks. Learning misapplied, rather than actual want of learning, has engendered most of those strifes which the Apostle represents to be the consequence of "foolish and unlearned questions." The questions themselves, however, do not the less deserve those appellations. When the subject of inquiry is not within the reach of human investigation, nor can be productive of any profitable result, it

matters not what degree of learning, of talents, or of ingenuity, may be bestowed upon it. It may serve to display the skill of the polemic, or to inflate his vanity. But no acquisition will accrue from it to the stock of real knowledge; no advancement will be made in true wisdom. Ignorant we must still remain of that which no human sagacity can discover; and unwise we shall still be justly deemed, in expending our labour on fruitless researches.

This part of our subject has already been considered in a former Discourse. By reference to some remarkable divisions and offences in the Christian Church, originating in questions of theology, neither capable of determination upon any known principles of human science, nor fully revealed to us in holy writ, it was shewn that to questions of this description the Apostle's caution in the text may, in the first place, be especially applied. Another class of questions, to which the same caution was deemed applicable, comes now to be examined, comprising such as relate to points which, whether or not they may be capable of satisfactory decision, are yet in their kind unprofitable and unimportant.

The distinction between these two classes

of questions will, perhaps, be better understood, by reverting to some of the principal doctrines already noticed.

Respecting the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, nothing can properly be said to be unimportant or unprofitable, which really tends to their elucidation, or which may guard them against interpretations irreconcilable with the Scriptures. The Sabelian, Arian, and Macedonian hypotheses, far from elucidating the subject of the Trinity, did but involve it more and more in inextricable perplexities. Opposition, therefore, to these heresies became necessary, not only because the questions agitated were unprofitable and vain, but also because they were unscriptural. The same observation applies also to the opinions of the Ebionites, the Docetæ, and others already mentioned, concerning our Lord's Incarnation. Here was something worse than mere waste of talents;—human imagination was opposed to Divine authority; and the demolition of every such engine, aimed, as it were, at the overthrow even of revelation itself, became the bounden duty of the guardians of the Christian faith.

But although these greater topics of controversy were not matters to be compromised, or slightly passed over by the advocates of

truth ; yet it cannot be denied, that out of them arose several minor points of discussion, which might, without injury to the main articles of the faith, have been left to every man's private judgment, could the contending parties have been persuaded to exercise such a mutual forbearance. Even these, however, too often produced fierce and almost interminable disputes.

1. On the doctrine of the *Trinity*, for example, differences have not unfrequently arisen, originating, not in doubt or disbelief of the doctrine itself, but in attempts at its illustration, or an overweening partiality for some particular exposition of it, supposed to be the only solution of its difficulties in which rational believers could possibly acquiesce. Several of the obscurer heresies mentioned in ecclesiastical history appear to have sprung from this vain desire of their founders to clear up points which it was of little importance to explain, and which might more wisely have been suffered to exercise only their own private speculations. Probably it was owing to this morbid appetite for discussion, that in the voluminous catalogue of heresies handed down to us from the early ages of Christianity, we find so many charged with Tritheism on the one hand, or Sabellianism on the other ;

errors which the parties themselves, perhaps, might sincerely have disclaimed, though by their own injudicious and misplaced disquisitions they had laid themselves open to the accusation. An instance, indeed, not very dissimilar to these occurred in the Church of England scarcely more than a century past ; when two of our most distinguished divines^d unhappily engaged in this species of warfare ; each endeavouring to establish his own peculiar exposition as that by which alone the doctrine could be vindicated against exceptions. And had not the prudence of the higher authorities of our Church interposed to silence the dispute, the foundation might possibly have been laid for some new schism in the body ; and the stigma of heresy might have been fixed even on both parties, while neither had the remotest intention of deviating from the Catholic faith. The same kind of indiscretion is also imputable to almost all who have laboured on what are called Trinitarian analogies^e ; attempts at physical or metaphy-

^d Sherlock and South.

^e The late Mr. Jones's "Trinitarian Analogy" is an instance of this ; and other Hutchinsonian writers have made similar attempts. Among those of earlier date, Abelard, in the twelfth century, appears to have made a conspicuous figure. See Bernhardus, in Ep. 190. c. 1, as quoted by Harenberg, in his *Otia Sacra*, p. 282.

sical comparisons, intended to elucidate the mode of union between the Persons in the Godhead; a point, not only above human comprehension, but equally unnecessary and unimportant for us to know in our present state.

2. Questions have in like manner been raised concerning the *Incarnation* of our blessed Saviour, incidental, not essential, to the doctrine itself. The plain doctrine deducible from holy writ, is, that our Lord was “perfect God and perfect man,” or, in other words, that “God and man was one Christ.” But continually has it been disputed, even by those who never meant to deny the doctrine itself, how and in what manner these two natures cooperated, or were conjoined, so as not to destroy the distinct identity of either. Hence arose endless controversies respecting the communication of the Divine attributes to the human nature; the participation of the Godhead in the sufferings of the manhood; the propriety of conferring upon the blessed Virgin the appellation of the “Mother of God;” with other questions of a similar kind; all, in a greater or less degree, unnecessary and unprofitable subjects of debate. And were it even admitted that they may be harmless in themselves, and not altogether unin-

structive, when discussed in the spirit of Christian peace and amity, yet might they, without any detriment to the truth, have been altogether spared, had the respective parties been content to acquiesce in a simple acknowledgment of the entire union and perfection of the two natures in the person of our Lord, without confusion of both or separation of either; this being in substance the whole of that "great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh."

3. Closely and inseparably connected with the doctrine of our Lord's Incarnation, is that of the *Satisfaction*, or *Atonement*, made by him for the sins of mankind. This also has been a subject fruitful of speculation to the disputatious inquirer; a subject too, on which, (if we may judge from some differences concerning it, even among divines of high and deserved reputation) some latitude of interpretation may be allowed, without surrendering or weakening the doctrine itself. It is hardly to be expected, that we should be able to clear up every difficulty respecting the necessity or the efficacy of *vicarious suffering*. Neither may it be possible for us to affix so clear and definite a meaning to the word *satisfaction*, when applied to the propitiation of the Father by our Lord's death and sacrifice,

as may preclude cavils and disputes. We know only that it has produced the effect which the word *satisfaction* implies, in that it has been accepted by the Almighty as a sufficient expiation for sin. But when questions are started, why such a sacrifice was necessary, or how it was rendered efficacious; when it is asked, how infinite justice and infinite mercy can be brought to concur, without some abatement of the one or the other in the Being by whom they are exercised; or, when arguments are required to prove that the Divine attributes could not possibly in any other way have met the exigency of the case; more seems to be called for than it is either necessary or becoming to require. So long as it is maintained, on the authority of holy writ, that “Christ died, the just for the unjust;” and that, “when we were enemies, “we were reconciled to God by the death of “his Son;” these inquiries concerning the grounds and reasons of the proceeding may surely well be spared. Admitting that they may laudably and beneficially exercise the faculties of pious and sober-minded men, with a view either to their own higher veneration for the mystery revealed, or to the removal of sceptical objections in others; yet ought they never to be regarded as matters

upon which our faith in the doctrine itself depends.

4. Again; many controversies have been raised respecting *the real presence of Christ in the holy Eucharist*. Between the doctrine of Transubstantiation maintained by the Church of Rome, and that held by Protestant Churches in general, there is a manifest and irreconcilable opposition. Between the Lutheran tenet of Consubstantiation and the tenets of other Protestant Churches there is also a broad line of distinction not easily to be mistaken. But most of the Reformed Churches, while they declare the elements of bread and wine to remain unchanged, and deny the body and blood of Christ to be *corporally* present, acknowledge them nevertheless to be *mystically* and *sacramentally* present; that is, they acknowledge, that, by virtue of the spiritual grace which accompanies the elements, they convey to the penitent and faithful communicant the full and actual benefits of our Lord's death upon the cross. This, it might be supposed, would suffice to unite all parties in this great act of faith and worship. But when subtle disputants began to dilate upon this general and simple view of the subject, endeavouring to describe the mode of our Lord's presence in more specific

terms, embarrassments soon arose, and differences, sometimes scarcely perceptible, occasioned almost inextinguishable feuds. Divisions, moreover, took place respecting the true characteristic properties of the sacrament. Between the Romish doctrine of the mass, which considers the eucharist as an actual propitiatory sacrifice, and the Socinian notion, which reduces it to a bare commemorative service, unaccompanied with any spiritual grace, there is a wide field of disquisition. Whether it may in any admissible sense be called a *sacrifice*, has been keenly debated, some contending for the application of that term to it in a qualified acceptation; others altogether rejecting it, as giving countenance to the error of the Romish mass. Different names and titles have also been given to this ordinance, according to these respective views of it; among which, however, there is probably much less substantial difference than the controversialists themselves have imagined: and however desirable it may be to form the most clear and distinct notions upon every point relating to so important a subject, we cannot but deprecate such a pertinacity respecting slight varieties of opinion as tends to multiply divisions, where agree-

ment in the essentials of the doctrine might otherwise easily be preserved.

5. Some of the contentions which have arisen on the subjects of the *Divine decrees*, of *grace*, of *free-will*, and other topics connected with them, were glanced at in the preceding Discourse. And here, again, questions not only dark, obscure, and inexplicable by human faculties, have laid the foundation of disputes, but questions also of little or no importance. Doubtless it is of importance that we should admit no hypothesis which makes God the author of sin; none that makes him a “respector of persons,” arbitrarily choosing some and rejecting others, without regard to their respective characters; none also that makes man a mere passive machine, acted upon by a resistless energy, or abandoned to a blind fatality, so as to become in effect not morally responsible for his conduct. Against such errors we cannot too cautiously guard, because they are errors which strike at the very root of religion, and cannot consist with the scriptural representations of either God or man. But when losing sight of these main points we fasten our attention upon some minute ramifications of the subject; when we cannot rest without

entering, if we may so say, into the whole detail of the Divine proceedings in the works of providence and of grace ; what can we expect, but, as the prophet says, to “sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind^f?” Yet how have these subjects divided whole Christian communities ! The contentions of supralapsarians and sublapsarians among Calvinists ; the disputes between Dominicans and Jesuits, Jansenists and Molinists, in the Romish Church ; the metaphysical controversies at a later period in the Lutheran Church, between two of its greatest ornaments^g, besides many others of greater or less notoriety ;—all these have turned chiefly upon subtleties scarcely perceptible to human discernment ; while the little conviction or satisfaction they appear to have afforded to the Christian world in general, is but too sure an indication how much talent, sagacity, and profusion of learning may be wasted in such inquiries. To explain, indeed, how the conduct of every human being can be foreknown to God, and yet depend on the free agency of the human will ; how the Divine grace can influence our minds without overpowering them, and even without any perception or consciousness on our part of its operation ;

^f Hosea viii. 7.

^g Wolfius and Buddeus.

are matters on which the ablest disputants may well forbear to hazard peremptory assertions. That God is the righteous Governor of the universe ; that man is free to do either good or evil, and is responsible for the choice he makes ; that the grace of God works sufficiently in all men to save them, if they neglect it not, but works effectually in them only who faithfully cooperate with it ; in short, that they who are saved, are saved by grace, and that they who perish, perish through their own fault ; if these great articles of Christian belief be stedfastly retained, far the greater number of the subordinate questions belonging to them may either be entirely dispensed with, or at least discussed with that mutual spirit of forbearance which should ever characterize those who profess to “ walk “ together as friends in the house of God^h.”

6. To these we may add another numerous catalogue of unnecessary and unprofitable inquiries, connected with the doctrines of a *resurrection*, an *intermediate state*, and a *future state*. The powerful hold which these subjects cannot but have upon the mind, may offer some apology for the too inquisitive spirit with which they are often investigated. Yet on no questions is it more

^h Psalm lv. 14.

necessary that some restraint should be imposed. The doctrines themselves are written as with a sun-beam on the sacred page. But each has its boundaries which we cannot pass ; and which it is as needless as it is presumptuous to attempt to remove. Among the Corinthians, St. Paul had to contend with some who asked, "How are the dead raised up? "and with what body do they come?" And what was the Apostle's answer? Did he solve the problem? Did he satisfy the curiosity of the inquirer? On the contrary, he replies, "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not "quickened except it die. And that which "thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that "shall be, but bare grain ; it may chance of "wheat or some other grain : but God giveth "it a body, as it hath pleased him, and to "every seed his own bodyⁱ." Here the truth of one mystery is simply corroborated by reference to another. The mystery of *vegetation* is, to the human understanding, scarcely less inexplicable than that of a *resurrection*. The former, being established by the evidence of our senses, serves greatly to strengthen our faith in the latter ; but to our further knowledge of the subject it contributes nothing ;—and here the inquiry is dismissed. In like

ⁱ 1 Cor. xv. 35—38.

manner, when the Sadducees sought to embarrass our Lord by perplexing questions respecting conjugal relationships in a future state, he dismisses them with the reproof, "Ye do err, "not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power "of God^k;" leaving them as uninformed as before as to the particular point they had proposed. Yet how many inquiries equally unprofitable and vain have not men since engrafted upon these doctrines; questions respecting the nature of the identity of the body to be raised, its consciousness of identity, its nature and functions in its spiritualized state, the habitation of departed spirits, the operations of the soul during its separation from the body, the mansions prepared hereafter for the righteous and the wicked, their joys and their miseries. On every one of these points conjectures may be formed and disputations raised, admitting of no confirmation whatever from holy writ, nor distinct evidence of any kind. Yet neither do these doubtful points affect in any degree the certainty of the great doctrines themselves with which they are connected; nor could the most explicit information concerning them (if such were attainable) alter in any respect either our duty or our interest in the result.

^k Matt. xxii. 29.

7. But controversies thus frivolous and reprehensible are not always confined to subjects merely *doctrinal*; they frequently extend to matters of *practical* concern, greatly to the peril and embarrassment of those who delight in them. The science of casuistry, a dangerous weapon in the hands of any but the most skilful combatants, too often, even in such hands, puts the cause of truth to hazard. To the perversion of talent of this kind may be ascribed many maxims of conduct, and many impracticable schemes of duty, unsanctioned, if not contradicted, by Scripture authority. The morals of the *Jesuits* have, through such misapplied ingenuity, become proverbial as to their laxity and evasive character. Their origin, however, may be traced to the scholastic theology of still earlier times. With little practical knowledge of mankind, and oftentimes but little reverence for the pure word of God, many of the older school-divines were occupied in the discussion of abstract moral propositions or hypotheses, full as injurious to practice as their metaphysical reveries were to the faith. Hence the admission of mental reservations, of distinctions between philosophical and theological sins, of subtleties respecting attrition and contrition, and of various other devices, substituted for the simple

word of God. Among these might also, perhaps, be classed some of the numerous tribe of *pietists*, so called, with devotees of still more fantastic character and denomination, whose errors, originating at first, perhaps, in no evil intention, consisted chiefly in laying undue stress upon matters unessential to the Christian character ; but which thence degenerated into eccentricities the most extravagant and reprehensible. These again paved the way for Anabaptists, Quakers, and many other sects, which aimed at a new sort of reformation, not only subversive of all external order and discipline in the church, but nullifying some of the most sacred ordinances of the Gospel itself.

8. *Mystical theology* furnishes us with yet another class, productive of the same pernicious consequences. Wild and visionary attempts to explore the world of spirits, or to hold personal converse with the Deity, gave rise, first to the Valentinian heresies ; then, to the cabbalistical theology ; afterwards, to what was called, by way of eminence, theosophy, or divine wisdom ; to astrology also ; to sorcery and magic ; and to every species of fanaticism which the perturbed imaginations of men could invent. Nor let it be supposed that these were the offspring merely of vulgar credulity, or of mental imbecility ;

they were in many instances evidently the result of spiritual or of intellectual pride; the wanderings of minds above the ordinary cast, not satisfied with the acquisition of simple truth, but ever intent upon the recondite and the marvellous, upon subjects conducive neither to faith nor practice; such as can never promote the real interests of man, temporal or eternal.

9. Not very remote from these are the indiscriminate and incautious cultivators of what has been called *emblematical* theology. The foundation of this species of mysticism is the supposed perfect harmony and conformity that subsists between the works of the natural and of the spiritual world. By expositors of this class, the whole visible creation is regarded as figurative of the invisible; and the Old Testament as containing throughout, under the veil of imagery, the entire substance of the New. To enucleate these supposed hidden verities is the aim of this race of interpreters. Every event antecedent to the coming of our Lord is supposed to correspond, as type and antitype, to some event subsequent to his coming; and on this presumed analogy the whole work of scripture-interpretation is carried on. Disputes, not inconsiderable, prevailed respecting this

subject in Holland, during the early part of the seventeenth century, between Cocceius, the abettor of the system on the one side, and Voetius his opponent on the other; each supported by advocates of high reputation. In our own country, and by some distinguished members of our Church, the same system has been much discussed, under the well-known title of Hutchinsonianism. Of its merits or demerits I forbear to say more, than that, however blameless, or even edifying it may be, when kept within certain bounds, it is nevertheless exceedingly liable to mislead. In its very principle also, it savours somewhat of a prurient kind of inquisitiveness, unbefitting the reverence due to the sacred oracles. Neither ought it, under any circumstances, to be laid down as a *systematic* rule of interpretation, or regarded as essential to a right understanding of the holy scriptures. The same may perhaps be said of a somewhat different study, to which theologians of considerable reputation have sometimes been inclined to attach undue importance; that of the *Rabbinical* interpreters of holy writ. Considered merely as evidence of the early opinions prevalent among the Jews, some of these expositors, however fanciful or extravagant, may be entitled to regard.

But further than this, it does not appear that they can materially assist in the elucidation of Scripture: and when they betray their admirers into any thing like deference to their authority, it is seldom that they are found to be safe or satisfactory guides.

The time would fail me, were I to pursue these subjects further, or to detail other controversies, equally undeserving of the labours bestowed upon them. Such were the reveries of some earlier as well as later sects, respecting the *Millennium*; of others, who maintained the final restoration of the wicked as well as the good to a state of eternal felicity, and thence called *Universalists*. Numberless unprofitable questions have also been agitated relating to the Mosaic accounts of the creation of the world, the Divine image in man, the situation of paradise, the fall, the deluge, the re-peopling of the world, the origin of nations, and their dispersion throughout the earth;—questions, upon which rash conjectures, or hasty inferences, have too often been drawn, giving occasion to infidel writers to disparage even the entire authority of the holy scriptures. The same might be observed of some rash attempts to expound prophecies not yet fulfilled; or to deduce from Scripture systems

of philosophy, physical or metaphysical, which it came not within the province of the inspired writers to reveal. Nor can we forget those unworthy subjects of contention and separation, which, even among protestants, have too often occurred on matters of *discipline*, and the *ritual* of the Christian Church. To what extent these were carried at an early period of the reformation in our own country;—when almost every decent rule or ceremony was, by some or other of the malcontents, proscribed with no less vehemence than even the grossest idolatries of the church of Rome;—is but too well known to every reader of our ecclesiastical annals.

As an antidote to these and to all other unimportant or unprofitable speculations in theology, it were well if those who engage in controversy of whatever kind, connected with revealed religion, would duly consider that Christianity itself deals not in scholastic subtleties and perplexities, neither was it chiefly intended for the exercise of our intellectual powers. Its greater truths, however mysterious and inscrutable, are for the most part clearly and intelligibly propounded. In conformity with these, every subordinate truth must, undoubtedly, be interpreted; and the comparative importance of any minor topic of

discussion is to be estimated, not only by the authority it appears to derive from Scripture, but also by the relation it bears to these main articles of our faith. Regard, therefore, is principally to be had to the great fundamental verities of the Gospel; and especial care is to be taken, that every truth, less important in itself, or less clearly and explicitly revealed, be made to harmonize with these. Still more necessary is it to beware that with any of these truths, whether of greater or lesser moment, nothing be intermingled of human conceit or of doubtful authority. "Other foundation," says the Apostle, "can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now, if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest¹. For the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire: and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is." All Scripture being given by inspiration of God, is indeed "profitable for instruction:" but men may build upon Scripture what will not abide the test it must hereafter undergo; and while Scripture itself remains firm and unshaken, false expositions, and false applications of it will, sooner

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 11, 12, 13.

or later, fall to the ground, and their memorial perish with them.

The surest safeguard against these errors will be to cultivate that wisdom from above which is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, “and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and “good fruits, without partiality, and without “hypocrisy^m.” The more this wisdom is cultivated, the less relish will men have for vain and unprofitable disputes. They will cease to be “wise in their own conceitsⁿ,” and deem it to be their best and noblest distinction, that they “receive with meekness the en- “grafted word, which is able to save their “souls^o.”

^m James iii. 17.

ⁿ Rom. xii. 16.

^o James i. 21.

SERMON VI.

2 TIM. ii. 23.

But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.

WHATSOEVER tends, in any respect, to the real elucidation of Scripture-truth, derives from that circumstance a certain degree of importance, which entitles it to attentive consideration. No questions, therefore, can properly come under the description of those here censured by the Apostle, which are conducive to that end. The highest of all knowledge, the most perfect of all wisdom, being that which issues from this sacred source, the utmost efforts of human ability can never be more beneficially employed, than in drawing from hence those inexhaustible supplies of instruction, which were intended for the universal good.

This observation may sufficiently obviate any misapprehension of what has already been said, in discouragement of those in-

quiries in theology, which, though they carry with them a great show of zeal for the truth, and may be unexceptionably well-intended, are yet far from promoting its real advancement. The censure could only be meant to apply to researches productive of no additional information, and even tending to obscure that of which we are already in possession. The sacred volume still lies open to all ; and its treasures are not to be withholden from any who will search for them with faith and patience. No investigation is to be discouraged, which has this for its object ; none, but such as has other purposes, or other tendencies, at least, than those which Revelation was designed to promote. It is not the suppression of any one truth, but the prevention of manifold errors, which the Apostle, and every one who enforces the Apostle's admonition, must be supposed to have in view.

As this has been the sole object of the two Discourses already delivered on this text of Scripture, so will it be in what yet remains to be said upon it. The caution it contains has hitherto been considered with reference to such questions as are either too profound for human investigation, or too unimportant and unprofitable to be made subjects of contention. The same caution is now to be ap-

plied to such as are of verbal, rather than substantial, difference; in which, whether from misconception, or some perverseness of spirit, between the contending parties, either the terms of Scripture, or the terms used in the interpretation of Scripture, are made the occasion of perplexity and discord.

These “strifes of words” may vitiate controversies of every description. They may obtrude into discussions on the most important and essential truths of Christianity, as well as those which are of lesser moment. They insinuate themselves also in various ways, more or less easy of detection; assuming different aspects under different circumstances. Sometimes the controversy professedly relates to a disagreement respecting the signification of *words*, but much more frequently it arises from substituting, whether designedly or undesignedly, one mode of expression for another, by which the *sense* is imperceptibly altered; or, from using a term capable of a variety of acceptations, in that which is not mutually intended or understood between the disputing parties. From these and other similar sources of contention, familiar to those who are versed in polemical writings, many a bitter warfare in theology has taken its rise.

To what extent such strifes as these were

carried on by the perverse disputers whom St. Paul complains of, we have no direct means of ascertaining. One striking instance, however, of that sort of misunderstanding which ensues from the use of the same terms in different acceptations, occurs in the contests which appear to have given occasion to St. James's admonitions respecting faith and works. St. Paul had used these terms to denote the distinct grounds of acceptance under the Law and under the Gospel. In the term *faith* he comprehends the whole of the Christian covenant as contrasted with the Jewish; which latter he calls a "law of works." The general scope of his reasoning on this subject, is to shew that the works of the Law were insufficient in themselves to procure salvation; that they could only be accepted through faith in the promised Redeemer; and that when that Redeemer was come, through whom salvation was to be obtained, the service of the Law (those peculiar works which it required) ceased to be any longer necessary. Nor does the Apostle stop here. He further contends, that works in general, comprising the utmost extent of obedience to the moral law which mankind in their present fallen state are capable of performing, could not be rendered acceptable to

God, without reliance upon the merits and intercession of the Redeemer, to atone for their imperfections. In this sense St. Paul preached justification by faith only, as alike applicable both to Jew and Gentile. But this doctrine, it appears, was soon perverted to a very different meaning, by setting faith in opposition to works, even to those fruits of righteousness and holiness, without which no man, under either of these dispensations, was allowed to hope for acceptance. Thus St. Paul was represented as preaching faith without works in the same sense as the Antinomians do of the present day; and this is the notion which St. James decidedly reprobates.

Here we see the consequence of verbal misrepresentation. St. Paul and St. James entirely agreed in their acceptation of the terms *faith* and *works*. St. Paul, when he spoke of faith, included in it whatever the Gospel requires as the condition of our salvation; and the tenor of his reasoning, both with Jew and Gentile, went to prove, that no works which man can perform, either of legal or of moral righteousness, without that faith, will be available. St. James virtually asserted the same. He reproved those who attached to the word *faith* a narrower signification

than St. Paul had given to it, by confining it either to a bare assent to the truth of the Gospel, or to a presumptuous reliance on salvation through Christ, without regard to the conditions on which that salvation depends. He insists upon the inseparability of faith from works in order to render it effective; and he shews, by the very same instance St. Paul had referred to, that the faith which justified Abraham was a faith productive of works. There is, therefore, no contrariety between the two Apostles. They take different views of the subject, but coincide in the principles on which they set out, and in the meaning of the terms they use. St. Paul maintains, that works without faith cannot save; St. James, that faith without works cannot save: propositions both equally true, and perfectly consistent with each other. The errors which each Apostle had to combat arose, in the former instance, from an abuse of the term *works*, so interpreted as to exclude the necessity of faith; in the latter instance, from a like abuse of the term *faith*, so interpreted as to exclude the necessity of those works, which faith itself obliges the believer to perform.

It might be expected that such an error as this would expire almost at the instant of its

birth; and that when the joint authority of these Apostles had so effectually guarded the doctrine from abuse on either side, all controversy concerning it must have ceased. But, unhappily, the same perversion of St. Paul's meaning, the same unwarrantable limitation of the word *faith* to a bare reliance upon Christ as a Saviour, unaccompanied by any practical conditions, has continued to create divisions and offences in the Church. And although the grosser systems of Antinomianism are far from being now generally adopted by those who thus misapprehend the Apostle's doctrine; yet such interpretations of the doctrine are still frequently resorted to, as tend much more to countenance that pernicious error, than to guard against it.

It becomes, then, of importance to inquire into the most frequent causes of such questions as these; an inquiry which I shall endeavour to elucidate, as heretofore, by reference to some past or present disputes on subjects of theology.

No one who duly appreciates the value of philological researches will indiscriminately censure *verbal* controversies. It is as impossible to understand the holy scriptures, as it is to understand any other writings, without a competent knowledge of the language in

which they were composed ; and where doubts arise as to the meaning of particular words or phrases on which the sense of important passages depends, critical skill, even of a superior cast, may be requisite. That there are passages of Scripture relating to some of the essential doctrines of Christianity, in which such skill is called for, cannot be denied. And though we may allow that no essential doctrine depends for its proof upon any one doubtful or disputable text, yet is it evident that the errors of those who corrupt the faith by a misinterpretation of such passages, cannot be effectually removed but by the aid of biblical criticism ; and to none of the learned world is Christianity more indebted, than to those who successfully cultivate this important study. In searching, therefore, for the cause of those “strifes of words” which the Apostle deprecates, we must trace to its source the abuse of this valuable talent, not its legitimate use. We shall find it, not in philology itself, but in the disposition of the philologist, either to lay undue stress upon what is of little moment, or to employ his talents in distorting and perplexing what might otherwise be made sufficiently clear and intelligible.

There can be no doubt that numberless

controversies have arisen from mere want of perspicuity on the part of those who handle theological subjects, and not from the want of it in the sacred writings, which they undertake to expound. Luther observed that, in his time, many heresies and errors arose, not from simplicity of diction, but from want of simplicity, and from an affectation of obscure expressions. Several writers on ecclesiastical history have shewn, that not only individuals, but entire sects, have been charged with heresy, chiefly on the ground of certain inaccurate or ambiguous expressions, which naturally gave occasion to such charges, although they were probably adopted without an intentional departure from the truth. Of so much importance is the rule laid down by Quintilian, that the disputant should be careful, not only that his hearers may understand him, but that they may not possibly misunderstand him : “ non ut intelligere possit, “sed ne omnino possit non intelligere curandum^a.”

Nearly allied to that real or affected obscurity, which both occasions and perpetuates religious feuds, is the practice of unnecessarily introducing into theological disquisitions peculiar terms or phrases unsanctioned

^a Inst. Orator. lib. VIII. c. 2. ad finem.

by the sacred writers. This practice appears to have been of early date ; and might partly owe its origin to the intermixture of oriental philosophy with the study of the Scriptures. Some have supposed that St. Paul had this in view, when he exhorted Timothy to “ shun “ profane and vain babblings.” If such were its intent, the admonition appears to have been much disregarded in succeeding ages. The ostentation of scholastic learning led very many to abandon the pure and simple diction of the Scriptures, and to substitute in its stead a phraseology better suited to the exercise of disputatious talents. The language of Plato or of Aristotle was too often engrafted on that of the Apostles and Evangelists : and a false philosophy thus imperceptibly gained ground, making fearful inroads upon the faith. The world had probably never heard of one half of the vain disputes which made Christianity a subject of scoffing and reproach among unthinking men, but for that pretended science, which elevates human knowledge above divine, or that depraved taste, which despises plain and unsophisticated truth.

Here, however, some explanation may be necessary, lest we should seem incautiously to condemn, (what to some has appeared

matter of offence,) the introduction of a phraseology not strictly scriptural into certain creeds and confessions of faith, still in use among us, and of the highest antiquity and authority in the Christian Church. Are not, it may be said, the terms Trinity, Incarnation, Substance, Person, and Essence, of this description; and have they not given frequent occasion to strife and contention?

One apology for these (if apology indeed be necessary) is similar to that already given for the enlargement and multiplication of such public formularies. The perverseness of heretical teachers, and their wantonness of speculation on some main articles of the faith, gave occasion to the use of these terms, and rendered them almost necessary for the preservation of sound doctrine. When several points connected with those articles came to be argued with a minuteness of investigation, called for by the subtleties of the adversary himself, the adoption of this new phraseology could hardly be avoided; nor could the doctrines themselves, perhaps, under such circumstances, have been otherwise effectually guarded against misapprehension. The censure, therefore, whether just or unjust, falls upon those whose temerity in diving into the depths of mystery, either first introduced

them into theological subjects, or necessarily led to their introduction by the advocates of the orthodox faith.

But, it must further be observed, that however we may deprecate the unnecessary use of terms not purely scriptural, and the contentions which have too often sprung from them; we must beware that we do not overlook the real utility of certain established modes of expression, which, though not of scriptural usage, are yet clearly and distinctly significant of the truths they denote. Thus, the terms Trinity and Incarnation so comprehensively describe the doctrines they relate to, that they serve as an almost decisive test of men's opinions on those doctrines. They convey to the intelligent hearer that definite notion of each doctrine, which it is hardly possible to misconceive, and which supersedes the necessity of more elaborate explanation. He who denies the essential Divinity of either of the Persons in the Godhead, cannot consistently use the former term; nor he who denies the union of God and man in one Christ, the latter. The Socinian, for example, who, instead of St. John's declaration that Christ is come *ἐν σαρκὶ*, "in the flesh," would rather say that he is come *ἐκ σαρκὸς* "of the flesh," (i. e. was born

of human nature only,) can hardly distort the term Incarnation to his own view of the subject. So it was with the word *ὁμοούσιος*, *consubstantial*, in the Arian controversy: of which it has been justly observed, that the Arians objected to it, not because it was obscure, but because it was too plain and significant to be misunderstood. When, therefore, the Arians endeavoured to set aside this epithet, which denoted that the three Persons of the Godhead were of the *same* substance, or Divine nature; and would have it changed for *ὁμοιούσιος*, to express that they were only of *like* nature; the dispute, however it might appear to superficial observers to be a mere verbal litigation, indicated, in reality, an essential difference between the parties concerning the doctrine itself; such a difference, that the one could not concede to the other the use of the appropriate expression, without a virtual renunciation of his own belief.

To avoid, however, as much as possible, the multiform questions, which expressions not current in Scripture too often occasion, the expositor's chief care should doubtless be employed in ascertaining the true signification of Scripture-words and phrases; which can only be done by diligent inquiry into their general or their particular acceptation, in the

times and places wherein the sacred writers lived. Recondite meanings and remote etymologies are not to be sought for; nor have they any material weight, when there is sufficient evidence how such words or phrases were commonly understood by those to whom they were immediately addressed. For this reason, the illustration of scriptural expressions by reference to the diction even of the most approved classical authors, requires to be attempted with caution. To many words in Scripture there is a peculiar sense attached, from their connection with the peculiar truths of revealed religion; to which we cannot expect to find an exact parallel in the usage of them by ordinary writers. Thus, the terms *righteousness* and *justification*, *flesh* and *spirit*, *old* and *new man*, will hardly admit of illustration from their current acceptation in works which have no reference to the doctrines of Christianity. A determinate and appropriate meaning belongs to them, and to other words of similar import, in which the sacred teachers alone can fully instruct us. If those who agitate doctrinal questions be negligent of these circumstances; if, instead of endeavouring to fix the sense of such expressions by Scripture-analogy, they rely more upon foreign aid; if they take the lan-

guage of heathen philosophy, or of scholastic metaphysics, for their authority in interpreting Christian theology; they will not only become meagre and spiritless critics in biblical researches, but will almost unavoidably be ensnared into false conceptions of the subjects to which they relate.

This has been exemplified in some controversies respecting the denomination, *Logos*, or *Word*, applied to our blessed Saviour. It has been keenly agitated, whether St. John borrowed this appellative from Philo the Jew, or from Plato; and whether his doctrine concerning it ought not to be expounded with reference to the sense attached to it by those writers? This dispute seems to proceed upon a presumption, that the same word used by two writers of a different age and country, and writing with very dissimilar views, must necessarily be taken by both in the same acceptation: a sort of paralogism, which has caused many a misinterpretation of the sacred oracles. But, to say nothing of the defect of that evidence which tends to prove that either St. John or any of the other Apostles was conversant with the writings of Philo or of Plato; it is a sufficient refutation of every hypothesis founded on this conjecture, that between the *Logos* of Philo or Plato, and that of St. John,

there is so manifest a difference, that the one can hardly be reconciled with the other; that they have little in common with each other but the name; and that Philo's notion of it militates, moreover, in many respects against the generally received opinions of the Jews, as well as against the doctrine of the Apostle. The whole superstructure of argument founded on such a basis, falls therefore to the ground; and the Apostle will stand acquitted of being indebted to any scheme whatever of human philosophy for his doctrine. His use of the term *Logos* evidently originates in a purer source; even in the fountain of divine inspiration. Taught by the wisdom that is from above, he ascribes to the *Logos* a being co-essential with God, possessing absolute as well as relative Divinity in Himself. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Word is here not only distinguished from all other beings by priority of existence; but is declared to be one with God Himself. The work of creation also is ascribed to Him: "without Him was not any thing made that was made:"—and this Divine, this All-powerful and Eternal Being, "was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Such representations the Apostle never could have derived from Gen-

tile philosophy. In the *Jewish* Scriptures, indeed, some traces of them might be discovered ; since the writings of the Old and the New Testament flowed from one and the same source of Divine inspiration. But whatever there might be in *heathen* theology bearing a resemblance to this doctrine, carried in it the marks of a copy, not of an original ; of a feeble, obscure, debased imitation, not of that genuine, authoritative, and decided character, which belongs to the sacred writings alone. Yet on the bare presumption that St. John must have had heathen philosophy in view, or upon a fond persuasion that heathen philosophers were the fittest interpreters of the Evangelist's doctrine, how many have been led into endless disputes, and into the most unworthy conceptions both of the Divinity and the Incarnation of the Son of God, grounded wholly upon their misconceptions of this peculiar appellation !

Controversies not unlike to these have arisen out of verbal misconceptions upon *other* doctrines also. If one definite acceptation were affixed to the terms *calling* and *election*, *regeneration* and *conversion*, *grace* and *faith*, *justification* and *sanctification*, it would hardly be possible that men, not diametrically opposed to each other in the main principles

of the Christian faith, should differ so widely as they seem to do in their exposition of these doctrines; contending with much plausibility, without advancing one step towards mutual conviction.

Take, for instance, the subject of *regeneration* in its connection with baptism. Some speak of regeneration as if it denoted the absolute perfection of holiness; that consummation of the Christian character, when evil habits and evil propensities have been so entirely subdued, and the love of God and of Christ so deeply rooted in the heart, that thenceforth perseverance to the end can be no longer doubtful. Now they who affix to it so very enlarged a signification, observing (what is too evident to be denied) that multitudes who have been baptized into the Christian faith never attain, or even seem to approach, to such entire perfection of character, scruple not to stigmatize all who contend for the inseparability of baptismal and spiritual regeneration, as superstitiously ascribing to the sacrament of baptism an effect to which it appears to be altogether inadequate. On the other hand, they who agree with our Church in maintaining the inseparability of the one from the other, understand by regeneration nothing more than that first prin-

ciple of holiness, that beginning of the spiritual life, of which baptism is not only the sign, but also the pledge, assuring us of its actual conveyance. Thus far, and thus far only, they extend the meaning of *spiritual regeneration*; and this, and this only, they maintain to be given in baptism. The ultimate efficacy of the gift they acknowledge to be still dependent upon our subsequent growth in grace. The great difference, therefore, between the contending parties originates in their different acceptation of the word *regeneration*; and so long as that discordance continues, it is impossible that their respective tenets should be made to harmonize. Yet is it no less evident, that, though this appears to be merely a verbal strife, it produces real and irreconcilable opposition, on a point of doctrine intimately connected with the grounds of our acceptance under the Christian dispensation.

Again, (as has been already suggested,) on the doctrine of *justification by faith alone*, agreement or disagreement will chiefly depend upon the acceptation in which the parties respectively admit the terms of the proposition. If one man understands by *faith* a reliance upon salvation through Christ, *without reference to any conditions* necessary to

render it available, his notion of justification by *faith only* will be very different from that of him who uses the term *faith* to denote a reliance upon that salvation, *accompanied with the performance of such conditions*. And here, again, though the difference may arise out of verbal misapprehension, the result is a manifest contrariety of sentiment on a point of vital importance.

Free grace is another phrase liable to similar misapplication. It is not strictly a scriptural phrase. But it expresses what St. Paul means when he says, "We are justified freely by God's grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus^b." In its most obvious signification, it denotes that the salvation of mankind in general is the *free gift* of God, unmerited on their part, and effected by the merits and mediation of Christ. In this sense it is perfectly consistent with those *conditions* annexed to the promises of the Gospel, which are implied in that faith by which we are justified. But they who deny that our salvation is dependent upon any such conditions, denote by *free grace* a special act of mercy, by which God arbitrarily calls certain individuals alone to salvation, and works in them irresistibly by his Holy Spirit. This also

^b Rom. iii. 24.

is a difference vitally affecting the character of the Christian covenant; and, therefore, however capable the words themselves, abstractedly considered, may appear to be of either of these constructions, the conclusions drawn from them cannot possibly harmonize with each other.

These observations may serve to shew that verbal disputes are, in their effect, of much greater importance than many are wont to suppose; and that in all discussions on subjects of holy writ, the first care should be that the parties clearly understand each other as to the signification of the terms they use, in maintaining their respective positions. For this purpose, not only the analogy of *words* must be attended to, but the analogy of the *faith* also. Where either of these is disregarded, no satisfactory result can be expected. Every proposition, and every corollary deduced from such proposition, will appear to the opposite party to be more or less different from his own, so long as he applies certain particular expressions in a sense different from that in which they are applied by others.

It appears to be chiefly owing to misunderstandings of this kind, that the great body of the clergy in our Church are, in the present day, so frequently and so unjustly

reproached by a party among their own brethren, for not preaching *evangelical* doctrine. They whose minds are prepossessed, whether in a greater or a less degree, with *Calvinistic* views of the Christian faith, attach to most of the expressions relating to the Christian covenant a somewhat different meaning from that in which other members of our Church interpret them. They apply, for instance, the words *calling, election, and predestination*, to the operation of certain *irrespective* Divine decrees in the salvation of *particular persons*, and not to the *general* privileges of all who are admitted into the covenant. Their interpretation of the terms *regeneration, justification, free grace*, and the like, is naturally made to correspond with this peculiar system; and when others question the accuracy of any such interpretation, a charge is too frequently retorted of denying the *doctrine itself* which those words import. Yet what is this but assuming the very point in debate? For if it can be shewn from the analogy of Scripture language, or of Scripture doctrine, that those expressions will not bear such meanings, except by a forced adaptation of them to that particular hypothesis; the accusation will then recoil upon those by whom it is advanced. Disputes so originating, and

so conducted, tend indeed to little but mutual recrimination ; and while such misconceptions prevail, every argument will fail of conviction, because to each party it appears to be founded on some inadmissible assumption.

A few words only remain now to be added, in conclusion of the whole subject. It has been the main object of this and the two foregoing Discourses, to point out some of those evils incident to theological controversy which arise from the agitation of questions which cannot be determined, of questions unnecessary to be determined, and of questions founded upon verbal misapprehension. If polemical divinity could be divested of these, what then remained to occupy the thoughts and the labours of the sincere inquirer into Christian truth would more amply repay the toil ; and the minds of controversialists would be so much less frequently soured and irritated as these incitements to animosity were diminished.

It is in vain, however, to hope for the entire extinction of religious animosity. “There must be heresies among you,” says St. Paul, “that they which are approved may be made manifest^c ;” and we are not to pay a compliment, even to well-intentioned errors, at the

^c 1 Cor. xi. 19.

expense of truth. But though it be an imperative duty to "contend earnestly for the faith;" yet is the faith itself weakened rather than strengthened, when points of debate are unnecessarily multiplied; when men "beat the air" in agitating questions unfit for discussion, or unworthy of it, or which only betray their ignorance of each other's meaning, and, perhaps, of their own.

Nothing, indeed, is more to be deprecated than that pruriency of mind which is perpetually in quest of religious novelties, and perpetually seeking fresh topics for polemical display. This disposition not only turns aside the student in theology from subjects more worthy his attention, but extends its pernicious influence even to those classes of the community which are least capable of improving by it, and most liable to imbibe error. The unlettered peasant, or artificer, when the question is put to him, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" disdains to answer, "How can I, except some man should guide me^d?" He is ready to set at nought the instruction of his pastor, and deems himself qualified to teach the teacher. Who can wonder, then, if "foolish and unlearned questions" are thus multiplied, and continually

^d Acts viii. 30, 31.

“engender strifes?” Who can wonder that rash speculations on dark and mysterious points of divinity are preferred to the plain and practical lessons of the word of truth?—that men will rather bewilder themselves in perplexities they can never unravel, than be taught to “add to their faith virtue^e,” and to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this “present world^f”—that their delight is in those “secret things which belong unto the “Lord our God,” more than in “the things “which are revealed, and which belong unto “them and to their children^g?”

The main antidote to these evils is to have a never-failing regard to the substantial edification of ourselves and others; discouraging, as far as may be, needless and vain discussions, and fixing our thoughts chiefly on those great leading truths of holy writ, which must, after all, be made the test of every subordinate opinion. This, together with a just reverence for the collective wisdom of the Christian Church, handed down from age to age, and exhibited in those comprehensive confessions of faith which have survived the wreck of time, and withstood the united attacks of adversaries from generation to generation; will be our best safeguard against the wayward-

^e 2 Pet. i. 5.

^f Titus ii. 12.

^g Deut. xxix. 29.

ness of a disputatious and licentious age. To this, however, must be added that corrective of the heart, as well as of the understanding, which the word of God itself most amply furnishes, and which must further be sought for by earnest supplications at the throne of grace.

It will, indeed, be the wisdom and the happiness of every one of us, while we “prove all “things,” to “hold fast that which is good^b ;” not to be “carried about with every wind of “doctrineⁱ ;” not to be ambitious of joining those who “burn incense to vanity, and cause “men to stumble in their ways from the ancient ways, to walk in paths in a way not “cast up^k .” Above all will it be our security and our confidence to pray with the Apostle, “that our love may abound yet more and “more in knowledge and in all judgment ; “that we may approve things that are excellent ; that we may be sincere and without “offence till the day of Christ, being filled “with the fruits of righteousness, which are “by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise “of God^l .”

^b 1 Thess. v. 21.

ⁱ Eph. iv. 14.

^k Jer. xviii. 15.

^l Phil. i. 9, 10, 11.

SERMON VII.

GENESIS i. 27.

*So God created man in his own image : in the image
of God created he him.*

IT is one of the most striking proofs of the limited extent of our natural faculties, and the general defect of human acquirements, that we cannot attain even to a perfect knowledge of ourselves without the aid of Revelation. In whatever point of view man is contemplated, whether with respect to his origin or his destination ; to his endowments physical, intellectual, and moral ; to the purposes for which he was brought into existence, or the means by which those purposes are to be effected ; doubts and perplexities arise which no sagacity, no research, conducted by the unassisted powers of the human understanding, has hitherto been able entirely to remove.

The inquiry itself, however, is not merely a matter of curiosity, but of duty. If it tended only to enlarge our sphere of intellectual gratification, it might be left to the pursuit of those few whom leisure or inclination prompted to the research. But it is of far more general concern, as connected with every one's personal well-being. Not only false philosophy, but false religion also, originates, for the most part, in ignorance of human nature; in forming theories of its capacities or incapacities, unwarranted by fact; and in adapting to those erroneous apprehensions of man the notions we entertain of his Creator. To ignorance in this respect much of heresy, and much of infidelity, may fairly be imputed. For, whether we overrate the natural powers of man, or reduce them below their proper standard, we prepare the way for dangerous errors; errors of fanaticism on the one hand, or of scepticism on the other. So necessary is a correct knowledge of this subject to a right conception of revealed religion itself, as well as to that self-guidance and self-control which are incumbent upon us as rational agents.

The Scriptures, however, consider this subject only in connection with the main purpose of Divine Revelation. To teach us how far

we are dependent upon our Creator, and how far we are endowed with powers that make us answerable for our own conduct ; to shew us what we are by *nature*, and what we may be by *grace* ; to give us right impressions of the relation we bear, both to this world and to that which is to come ; this is the knowledge of ourselves, derived chiefly, if not wholly, from the sacred oracles. And these, it must be confessed, are the points which render it a subject of primary importance. A physical or metaphysical knowledge of the human faculties, doubtless, has its use and its value. Researches into the organic structure of man, and investigations of those wondrous mental powers with which he is gifted, are among the noblest of scientific pursuits. They are capable also, in many respects, of such elucidation, as may greatly promote our general welfare, by shewing how closely that welfare is connected with a right application of our faculties, corporeal and intellectual. They do even more than this. They enlarge our conceptions of that creative power, that comprehensive wisdom, and that all-pervading goodness, which characterise the Author and Giver of these faculties. Thus they prepare the contemplative mind for such further knowledge respecting the creature so gifted,

as the Creator himself may vouchsafe to reveal. But here is their legitimate boundary. And here it is that revelation takes up the theme, to complete that which the utmost stretch of human speculation is compelled to leave imperfect.

The first question which we find ourselves unable otherwise to resolve, and for which we necessarily turn to the sacred volume, respects the *primeval* state of man, as he came out of the hands of his Creator. And to this, as set forth in the words of the text, the present inquiry will be confined.

No other probable reason can be assigned for the creation of man, (or, indeed, of any class of intellectual beings,) than the benevolent intention of the Creator to communicate to him some portion of that happiness which emanates from himself as its first and all-prolific source. Nor does it consist with the perfections of the supreme Being to suppose that this happiness would be rendered unattainable, through any inherent defect in man's nature, any incapability, moral or physical, to fulfil the purpose of his existence. The possibility of sinning we can easily conceive to belong to him. It is evident, indeed, that if his state were intended to be that of trial and probation, to qualify him for some

higher sphere of existence by the moral advancement of his faculties, a liability to forfeiture or failure must have been attached to it. But that before any actual debasement of his nature took place, he should have been constituted with such a preponderant bias to evil, or with such a disposition to sin, as his natural powers were unable to resist, is a supposition hardly to be entertained, without casting an imputation upon his Maker, which reason, no less than revelation, compels us to reject.

The brief account given by the sacred historian corresponds with this view of the subject. His description of man's creation forms a striking contrast with what is stated of the other creatures of this lower world. "God said, Let us make man in our image." "Here," says a pious father of the Church^a, "learn to know thyself." "This mode of speech," he observes, "had not yet been used in any other work of creation. Light had been made by the simple mandate of the Deity, who said, Let there be light, and there was light. The firmament, the stars, the seas, and whatsoever animals inhabit earth, air, or sea, were made, without con-

^a Gregory Nyssene.

“sultation or deliberation, by the word only
“of him who called them into being. But
“it was not so with man. Learn, then, thy
“value and thy dignity. Thy creation was
“not the result of a mere command, but of
“counsel and deliberation, that a being might
“be produced worthy of the infinitely wise
“Artificer.” Similar observations occur in
other commentators. It is only, however, in
a figurative sense, and in accommodation to
human conceptions, that *counsel* or *delibera-
tion* can be predicated of the Deity. And in
this instance nothing more can properly be
understood by those terms, than that the
preparatory introduction, the peculiar solemn-
ity of expression, which ushered in the crea-
tion of man, seems intended to indicate the
production of a being of higher order than
any that had yet issued from the Almighty
Word. The result corresponds with this re-
presentation. “So God created man in his
“own image: in the image of God created
“he him:” the expression being reiterated,
as if to impress upon the mind of the reader
a recollection never to be effaced.

But here the main question presents itself,
In what did this image consist? What may
we infer from the expression, that will convey
to us any clear or adequate conception of the

primeval excellencies of the Father of the human race?

In the Mosaic narrative, man is evidently included among the works of creation which his Maker pronounced to be “very good:” worthy, that is, of their Divine Artificer, and perfectly adapted to the ends and purposes for which they were respectively formed: since in no other sense can the term *goodness* be applied to creatures who were but that instant brought into existence, and who had undergone no trial of their conduct. To obtain, therefore, a right apprehension of what constituted the Divine image in man’s nature, we must consider what were those ends and purposes, and what qualifications were necessary for their attainment.

It is manifest both from the sequel of this history, and from the references to it in other parts of Scripture, that man was created for immortality, and that his title to immortality was suspended upon the condition of unreserved obedience to the Divine will. The penalty of transgression was to be death: and when that penalty had been incurred, he was instantly removed from the means previously afforded him of perpetuating his existence. St. Paul affirms, that “by one man sin entered

“into the world, and death by sin^b.” The inference is obvious, that had not man sinned, death had not ensued. Immortality would have been the reward of obedience, as the forfeiture of it was the punishment of disobedience.

Whether this immortality was a special gift, superadded to man’s natural powers, or was originally essential to his nature; is a question of more subtlety than importance; it certainly was not so essential to his nature, but that he might be deprived of it, and yet retain many other of his original properties. This the event undeniably proved. And the conclusion, in either case, is the same. The gift, natural or supernatural, was at the disposal of Him who gave it; to be continued, or withdrawn, as supreme wisdom and goodness might direct; subject to the conditions on which it was bestowed; and no otherwise the prerogative of man, than as held by the reasonable tenure of that dependence.

As a creature thus designed for immortality, and bound by corresponding obligations to an absolute conformity with the will of his Maker, man stands distinguished from all the inferior beings. For these great ends

^b Rom. v. 12.

were his appropriate faculties given. He was made “in the image of God,” that he might be able to know God, and to serve Him, and to enjoy His unceasing favour in whatever state the Almighty should see fit to prepare for him. What those faculties were, is the next point for our consideration.

Very fanciful opinions have been entertained upon this subject. But, without giving countenance to any extravagant imaginations, it cannot but be supposed, that in the state in which man first came out of the hands of his Creator, even his bodily powers were pure and perfect in their kind, with no tendency to corruption or disease, and not soliciting to evil by their natural cravings. With a less degree of perfection than this, even in his animal frame, we can hardly imagine him to have been numbered amongst the creatures that were “good” in their kind, and whom the Creator beheld with complacency as the work of His own hands.

For similar reasons, the intellectual powers of man, on his first entrance into being, we must suppose to have been without blemish or defect; adequate in all respects to the exigencies of his condition; and such as might enable him effectually to exercise that dominion which was assigned to him over the

inferior creatures. But the notion that our first parents attained, whether intuitively or otherwise, to such scientific acquirements as are now the result only of the most laborious researches, or of the collective experience of many successive generations, is neither capable of proof, nor carries with it any appearance of probability. The natural perfection of the faculties themselves, by which knowledge is obtained;—of perception, of judgment, of memory; would indeed be indispensable to the full enjoyment of their state of bliss. But to what actual attainments these faculties might conduct them, is quite a distinct consideration. They who have contended that Adam must have been the most learned of mankind; that he had such stores of knowledge as no mortal since has ever possessed; that he was the most consummate master in every branch of science, physical, moral, or metaphysical;—opinions occasionally to be found among fanciful commentators;—argue without *data*, at least, if not in opposition to something like demonstrative evidence. For, that such knowledge was *innate* in man, we know not either from Revelation or from reason. But, if it were not innate, by what means was it acquired; or of what utility can we conceive it to have

been? It might, indeed, be the result of inspiration; of immediate revelation from the source of all knowledge. But where are the proofs of this? And why are we to suppose, without proof, that which can neither be shewn to be necessary to man's original well-being, nor proved to be the certain consequence of those perfect faculties with which we believe him to have been gifted?

With respect to *religious* knowledge, indeed, it is more than probable that other means were vouchsafed to him for the acquisition of it, than the exercise of his own natural faculties. The sacred history, brief as it is, represents to us a certain freedom of communication on the part of his Maker, which appears to have been man's inestimable privilege while unpolluted with guilt. If the Almighty vouchsafed thus to hold intercourse with him even in matters pertaining to his bodily support and welfare; if he vouchsafed to convey to him a knowledge of the creatures around him, to provide for him a partner of his enjoyments befitting his own rank in the scale of being, to direct him even to the choice of sustenance suited to his nature, and to bestow upon him the gift of language; can we doubt, that in matters of still greater moment, such communications would be even more

abundantly imparted? We here reason indeed, it must be confessed, rather from probable analogies than from any positive evidence. But when we find express mention made of Divine conferences with man on subjects of inferior concern, and when we find moreover the Almighty directly expostulating with Adam on his transgression of a command which had been personally enjoined him; we can hardly but infer, that something more than the mere command must have been made known to him; that rewards attendant on his obedience, as well as penalties on his disobedience, had been held out to him; that the attributes and perfections of the Supreme Being had been so far, at least, manifested to him, as to make him perceive, not only his dependence upon that Being for every good he could enjoy, but also the certainty that no befitting measure of happiness should be wanting to him, so long as he conformed himself to the Divine will. Less than this, it seems impossible to imagine would have been vouchsafed to a rational and intelligent creature, created for immortality and bliss, yet placed in a state of trial and probation, and liable, upon transgression, to a forfeiture of all his highest hopes and expectations. Nor would it be unreasonable, per-

haps, to carry our conjectures even somewhat beyond this ; to deem it probable, that, in a state unaccompanied, as yet, with the various occupations and delights of social life, and limited to comparatively few sources of intellectual gratification, the most exquisite, as well as the most necessary of his primeval attainments were derived immediately from the fountain of infinite wisdom and knowledge. With respect, however, to the mode, or the extent of such communications, the veil that is cast around them is not to be drawn aside by mortal hands.

But, whatever may be our conjectures respecting the extent of man's primitive *intellectual* powers, and their indication of the Divine image impressed upon him ; it is not to them alone that we are to look for its noblest manifestation. The *moral* faculties of the soul are those which most essentially characterise him, and elevate him above other terrestrial beings. His ready perception of moral good ; his almost instinctive approbation of it, when it is once clearly discerned ; his consciousness of obligation to conform to it ; his high sense of dignity and elevation in so doing ; his aspirations after even unattainable excellence in this respect ; all these appear so decidedly as emanations from the

source of supreme good, that in no other qualities can we conceive the impress of the Divine image to be so unequivocally marked. In these, therefore, we may confidently presume that our first progenitor was created no less perfect, than in his gifts of reason and understanding.

Now, to the perfection of moral powers, not only a rectitude of the *understanding* is necessary, but also a rectitude of *will*. The one faculty, therefore, must be supposed equally perfect with the other, (according to the measure in which both may be consistent with finite and limited excellence,) in order to constitute a rational nature intrinsically and relatively good, though not absolutely and divinely perfect. The *intellect* of such a being is perfect in its kind, when it represents things to the mind as they really are, and is thus the vehicle of pure unsophisticated truth. The *will* is perfect, when it freely accedes to that which is propounded by the intellect, thus rightly informed. It is the province, therefore, of the intellect to rule, and of the will to obey. The former prescribes; the latter executes. Whenever these are at variance, disorder must ensue: when they act in unison, the result is moral good. Obliquity of judgment may mislead

the will; perversity of will may darken the judgment; but if each perform its functions as they were ordained to perform them, nothing is wanting to a relative perfection of character in the being to whom they belong.

It is essential, however, to this perfection of the will, that it should have entire *freedom* to give or to withhold its concurrence with the dictates of the understanding. This is its distinct and appropriate character; and this it is which makes us in reality responsible agents. Were it otherwise, the will would invariably follow the suggestions either of reason or of the passions. But it has the power of resisting both. It can stubbornly resist a sense of duty; it can successfully withstand the solicitations of the most impetuous and domineering appetites of our nature. This inherent power to choose betwixt good and evil seems necessary to every creature placed in a state of moral probation. Nevertheless that will is certainly not perfect in its kind which has any *bias towards evil*. Therefore, in man, as he first came out of the hands of his Creator, there can be no doubt that it was wholly without such a bias; and though the consciousness must have existed of being able to act contrary to truth, reason, and virtue; yet, until it was by some special

operative cause perverted from its original inclination, it seems monstrous to imagine that such could have been its inborn propensity.

“The image,” then, “of God” in man is the conformity of the chief perfections of the human mind with the perfections of the Divine intellect and will. The Divine intellect has necessarily a perfect knowledge of universal truth; and the Divine will is determined by that knowledge to every thing wise, and just, and good. The perfection of man consists in such powers of intellect as enable him to discern the Divine will, and such rectitude of intent as prompts him to make that will his own. The entire character includes the *purpose* of whatever is holy and right, together with the *ability* to perform that purpose.

This view of the subject corresponds, not only with what seems to be necessarily implied in the terms used by Moses to describe the nature of man, but also with what is said respecting that *renewal* of the Divine image of man, which is one great privilege of the Christian redemption. The effect of man’s fall is represented to be the darkening of his understanding, and the perversion of his will. The effect of his redemption by Christ is to

remedy those evils. It is, as St. Paul expresses it, “putting on the *new man*, which, “after God, is created in righteousness and “holiness^c” *holiness* implying the firm purpose of conforming to the Divine will; *righteousness*, the rectitude of the understanding in regulating that purpose. These joint perfections, therefore, must have constituted the Divine image in which Adam was created. For in what could that image have consisted, but in that which he lost by transgression, and regained by his redemption? The Apostle’s expressions seem purposely chosen, to carry our thoughts back to the primeval state of man. “God,” says Moses, “created man “in his own image.” “The new man,” says St. Paul, “after God, is created in righteousness and holiness.” No parallel can be more strongly marked. Conjecture may be busy in framing various hypotheses upon the nature and extent of man’s other endowments, whether of mind or body; but respecting these prominent features of the intellectual and moral character we can hardly adopt errors of any magnitude, without a wilful departure from that word of truth, which here, as in other cases, was given to be “a lantern “unto our feet, and a light unto our paths^d.”

^c Ephes. iv. 24.^d Ps. cxix. 105.

Dismissing, then, all fanciful or doubtful speculations ; not attempting to be “ wise “ above what is written,” or to answer every vain and frivolous question with which even sciolists may find it easy to embarrass the subject ; we may content ourselves with what has been thus briefly, yet comprehensively, revealed. We know, that man was at first created good and perfect in his kind. We know, that that perfection must have extended to all his faculties, so as to qualify him for the great purposes of his being. We know, that he was created to be immortal. We know that he had duties to discharge, and injunctions to obey ; and that upon his preserving that integrity and perfection of nature in which he was formed, depended the further extension of his bliss, and his ultimate good. We know, likewise, that such requisitions could not have been exacted by a just and merciful Creator, had there not been given the ability to perform them ; and hence we infer those perfections, moral and intellectual, in the first man, which in an equal degree we expect not now to meet with in any of his posterity. Thus far reason, aided by the light of revelation, may safely conduct us. If we deviate from this strait and simple path, or if we desert the light that is held out to us, we

may gain, perhaps, the admiration of the rash and thoughtless, but we shall look in vain for a more substantial recompense of our labours.

To bring, then, these reflections to a close. “God,” says Solomon, “made man upright.” “In the image of God (says Moses) created he him;” and “God saw,” that, together with the other works of creation, he was “very good.” What becomes, then, of the impious imaginations of those who would charge the Creator with being accessory to the faults of his creatures, and make him primarily the author of sin? How will the Calvinist reconcile this with his hypothesis, that Adam’s transgression was the result of a divine and irresistible decree? How will the Socinian make it accord with his persuasion, that man originally possessed no greater perfection of moral or intellectual faculties, than that which he still inherits? To detract from the primitive excellence of him who was made in the image of God, is virtually to detract from the perfections of him in whose image he was made; and to imagine the fault of the creature to have originated in the will of the Creator, is virtually to transfer the guilt to Him.

How much more justly and satisfactorily may we apply the subject to ourselves, both

“ for reproof and for instruction in righteousness !” In contemplating man’s original nature as the Scriptures represent it to us, we cannot but acknowledge the goodness, and admire the excellence, displayed in this noblest creature of the lower world. We cannot also but deplore that deflection from his perfect state, which is but too visible in every descendant of Adam, and of which we ourselves severely feel the consequences. But the knowledge of what man once was, and might have continued to be, teaches us that our own well-being and perfection depend upon our continual endeavours to conform ourselves to that image in which he was created. It impresses us with just notions of the dignity of virtue, and the turpitude of sin. It shews us, that then only we are worthy to be called sons of God, when we testify our similitude to Him, by willing what He wills, and renouncing what He forbids. It turns our thoughts to the contemplation of those perfections in God himself, which the more they are considered, and the better they are understood, the more desirous shall we be to obtain his favour, and to be made partakers of his heavenly benediction. These are the great practical lessons it holds out to us. But while it bids us thus aspire to the

true dignity of our original nature, it mortifies us also with the humiliating consciousness of our own present inability to realize the character at which we aim. Yet even this mortification leads to the attainment of our wishes. In our humiliation is our safety. Conscious infirmity prostrates us at the throne of grace, where no faithful supplicant sues in vain.

Thus in every way may the subject be turned to our profit. While it elevates, it humbles; while it awakens gratitude, it inspires awe; while it magnifies the Creator, it exalts no less the Redeemer and the Sanctifier, through whom alone the divine image, once lost, can ever be restored. It begins, therefore, and it ends in faith: for that which God hath given, and man hath forfeited, none but God himself can restore; and on HIM alone must be our dependence for a blessing on every exertion that we make to obtain “the prize of the high calling that is set before us.”

SERMON VIII.

PSALM li. 5.

*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did
my mother conceive me.*

IN the investigation of human nature, difficulties continually multiply around us, when we attempt to proceed without the light of revelation. We may discern enough to convince us that man, as he now exists, appears not to be such a being as we must suppose him to have been when he first issued from the source of moral perfection. But how he came to be thus debased, or by what means his actual degeneracy may be rectified, we inquire in vain. The utmost extent of human research goes no further than to ascertain the existence of the evil; neither the cause nor the remedy has it ever yet been able satisfactorily to explain.

Here, then, as well as in our inquiry into

the primeval state of man, (the subject of a former Discourse,) revelation must be called to our aid. Nor will it disappoint our purpose, if we be content to rest in a general solution of the question, not expecting the elucidation of every minute point on which scepticism may raise a doubt. Points there undoubtedly are in this, as in most other doctrines of revealed religion, concerning which the Scriptures, if not wholly silent, are far from gratifying our curiosity. These, it may be presumed, are unnecessary to be determined, having no tendency to that edification which it is the main object of the Scriptures to promote.

The subject itself is, indeed, one which should awaken sentiments of the deepest humility. Yet on no question, perhaps, have men been more inquisitively curious, more boldly speculative. It were no easy matter to exhibit all the shades of diversity concerning it, which have generated sects and parties in the Christian world, and have created division even among members professedly of the same communion in faith and worship.

The zeal, however, with which these discordant opinions have been maintained may be considered as one indication of the real importance of the subject. And, undoubt-

edly, the fall of man from his primitive state of innocence is too prominent a feature in revealed religion to be regarded with indifference; nay, it is so essentially interwoven with the revelation, as to be justly deemed a fundamental article of our faith. The necessity of man's *redemption* is grounded upon his *fall*. The extent of that redemption corresponds with the extent of his corruption. In every part of the Christian dispensation this is presupposed as an indisputable point. It is therefore of primary importance to examine the *evidences* of the fact, its *causes*, and its *consequences*, as they are represented in holy writ, and confirmed by the general experience of mankind.

1. The historical *evidence* of the fall of man stands upon the same ground of credibility with every other portion of the sacred records relative to times before the flood. No writings of equal antiquity are in existence by which it can be contravened. None of subsequent date cast the slightest suspicion upon its fidelity. On the contrary, many appear to concur with it as far as remote tradition, or confused representations of facts imperfectly known or understood, may be said to correspond with truth. Nothing, therefore, stands in the way of our admitting this par-

ticular narrative upon the same authority of divine inspiration as that which gives to the whole of the books of Moses a sanction purely sacred.

It is an argument also of no little weight in favour of these records, that we must either assent to the statement they give of this transaction, or abandon the hope of otherwise accounting for a phenomenon in human nature which all mankind confess to be unquestionably true. The general frailty and faultiness of our species is too palpable a fact to be denied. It has been from age to age the theme of heathen, as well as of Christian writers. It meets the moralist and the legislator at every step. It is the plea of the profligate, the humiliation of the virtuous, the acknowledged obstacle to perfection in all who are destined to pass through this probationary state. Thus far, revelation accords with reason and experience, in testifying that man is no longer that excellent being which the Author of his nature intended him to be.

What, then, is the scriptural solution of this phenomenon?

It is substantially this :—that our first parents were tempted by a subtle and malignant being of a superior order, to transgress a positive command of their Creator; that a pe-

nalty, previously denounced, was in consequence executed upon them ; that the effects of this penalty have devolved upon their posterity ; and that evil, natural and moral, have hence been introduced into this part of God's creation, rendering it that scene of comparative imperfection and disorder, of which our daily observation furnishes us with but too convincing evidence.

Respecting the circumstantial parts of this history, attempts to know more than is recorded in the sacred narrative tend rather to darken than to elucidate the subject. The natural quality of the forbidden fruit, the form of the serpent assumed by the tempter, the perceptible change instantly felt by the offenders as the consequence of transgression, are points too briefly mentioned to admit of full explanation.

It is surely better to rest in this our acknowledged inability to penetrate further into the circumstances of the transaction, than to resolve the whole into a mystical allegory, for the purpose of rebutting some futile objections of the infidel and the scoffer. Attempts to explain away the literal meaning of Scripture, in compliance with the scepticism of the incredulous, are always hazardous, and seldom produce the intended effect. In

this instance, the plain and sober style of historical narrative precludes any fair supposition of a mystical intent. Nothing seems more improbable than that a mere fiction or apologue, however apposite, should be so interwoven with evident matters of fact, as to afford not the slightest intimation of the writer's intention that it should be otherwise than literally understood. Nor can the allegorical interpretation be here justified on any plea of necessity. Many probable conjectures may be formed, sufficient to vindicate the literal interpretation against exception. But we have also the direct authority of Scripture itself for adhering to the literal interpretation. The narrative is referred to in the New Testament as an authentic and indisputable record. In his first Epistle to Timothy, St. Paul speaks of the serpent's having "beguiled Eve through his subtlety^a," and her "being deceived in the transgression^b:" and in the Epistle to the Romans, his whole argument respecting the universal prevalence of sin, is founded upon the supposed reality of this history. To discard, therefore, the literal interpretation, is to do away the main force of the Apostle's reasoning, and to represent him as laying the foundation of the

^a 2 Cor. xi. 3.

^b 1 Tim. ii. 14.

Christian redemption upon a mere imaginary transaction.

2. Admitting, then, this evidence of the fact, we are at no loss to assign a *cause* fully adequate to the effect ; a cause, neither incredible in itself, nor contradicted by any known testimony historical or physical. History has no fact to oppose to it : human reason has no plausible hypothesis to substitute in its stead. If, indeed, we are asked *how* the transgression of Adam could entail upon his posterity so universal a corruption ; we may readily confess our ignorance. Here, as in many other cases, we may be certified of the fact, without being able to explain the mode. It is enough that it involves no absurdity or contradiction ; nay, more, that it is rendered credible by an analogy of the most obvious and frequent recurrence. That mortality and corruption should have been the result of eating the forbidden fruit ; or that whatever is engendered of a mortal and corrupt stock should partake of those qualities ; is no more incredible with respect to moral affections and dispositions, than what we daily witness in the transmission of hereditary disease, or of hereditary similitude in feature and other personal qualities. To press the inquiry beyond this general analogy is neither

requisite nor expedient. We know little of the history of Adam after his fall and his expulsion from paradise; and, consequently, we know not to what extent his moral or his natural qualities were impaired by this disastrous act. But there is nothing unreasonable in supposing that the same imperfection, whatever it might be, would be transmitted to his offspring; and that, not merely from imitation of the parent's example, but from inheriting the same propensities. This, indeed, might reasonably be presumed, from the universality of the evil; since if there were no original taint of moral pravity derived from the first progenitor of mankind, it is hardly possible to conceive that some instances would not occasionally have arisen of persons entirely free from sin. Yet, who does not bear witness to the truth of the Apostle's assertion, "All have sinned, and "come short of the glory of God^c?" Who, on a review of his own natural bias to evil, however counteracted by the grace of God, and by the effect of early religious impressions, will not adopt the Psalmist's confession, "Behold, "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did "my mother conceive me?" Throughout all generations, from the first transgression of

^c Rom. iii. 23.

Adam unto the present hour, this charge continues in full force. Our blessed Saviour alone, who was not a mere son of Adam, but the Son of God ;—He alone was absolutely free from sin.

The effect, then, of Adam's transgression adheres to us all. It is that corruption born in us, that natural disease of the soul, which St. Paul by a strong figure of speech denominates *the law of sin*. This is what is also usually called *original sin* ; a term, which seems to have a twofold reference ; used in one respect, to distinguish it from actual sin, as a propensity to evil differs from the commission of it ; and, in another respect, to contrast it with that original righteousness in which man was at first created. It is called *sin*, not in the same sense in which we speak of actual sin, incurring the guilt of disobedience ; but simply to denote that vitiated state of the natural affections, which though it does not constitute positive guilt, yet cannot but render the object of it unacceptable in the sight of God. In man, as he was originally created, there was no natural impediment to a perfect conformity of his will and affections with the will of God. In man, since the fall, such an impediment manifestly exists. His appetencies and affec-

tions are now at variance with each other, and with the Divine will; so as to realize that distressing picture which St. Paul delineates, "I know that in me (that is, in my "flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is "present with me; but how to perform that "which is good, I find not. For the good "that I would, I do not; but the evil which "I would not, that I do^d."

3. This leads us to consider, lastly, the *consequences* of the fall; what change it has actually wrought in our nature, and what evils, either of guilt or punishment, are thence incurred.

Here it is, that the greatest contrariety of opinion prevails. Some deny the transgression of Adam to have in any way affected his posterity, either as to the punishment incurred by it, or as to any depravation of their nature. Others maintain that the personal guilt of Adam is imputed to his posterity, and that their nature is, in consequence, so entirely depraved, as to be destitute of any affection towards good, and incapable of willing any thing but evil.

How irreconcilable the former of these opinions is with Scripture, appears from the many passages that speak of the state of

^d Rom. vii. 18, 19.

servitude and bondage to which mankind in general are subject, through the dominion of sin. "Whosoever committeth sin," says our Lord, "is the servant of sin^e." This servitude St. Paul thus forcibly describes: "That which I do, I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the Law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me^f." What words can more strongly express such a conflict with our present innate corruption, as, without some countervailing power, must necessarily lead to sin?

On the other hand the opinion of those who hold the sin of Adam to be so penally imputed to his posterity, that by nature they are destitute of all desire of good, and capable of nothing but evil, is no less untenable. It is injurious to the moral attributes of the Deity; it strikes at the root of moral responsibility; it is incompatible with that general persuasion of right or wrong, which, whether in any particular instance erroneous or correct, accompanies every action we perform; and it sets at nought every injunction of holy writ addressed to us as beings

^e John viii. 34.

^f Rom. vii. 15, 16, 17.

accountable for what we do. If the image of God in man were thus absolutely extinct, vain would be the requisition to “work out his own salvation.” Even the grace bestowed upon him for that purpose, unless irresistible, would be unavailing. Were he thus labouring under burthens not his own; endowed with no powers to discern betwixt good and evil; actuated by no desire to avoid the one or to choose the other; neither reward nor punishment would be the just retribution of his deeds. An arbitrary, overruling destiny must fix his doom; and this, whether it be the decree of unconditional election, or of irreversible reprobation, seems to be the only hypothesis adapted to a scheme so utterly inconsistent with the free agency of a rational creature.

We may be thankful that we are not required, by what the Scriptures have revealed, to adopt either of these extravagant theories. There is a medium betwixt them, which, whether we can agree or not in adjusting every lesser point, may be sufficient at least to secure us against errors so practically dangerous.

Admit, then, that “the Scripture hath concluded all under sin^g,” that “all have

“sinned and come short of the glory of God^h,” that “by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sinⁱ,” and that “by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation^k ;”—yet we are bound so to interpret these declarations, as to render them consistent with what the same Scriptures declare of our duties and our obligations. If the sacred writings constantly address us as responsible agents; if, while they reveal to us the means of removing the corruption that is within us, they require of us such faith as befits rational beings, and such practice as constitutes a reasonable service; how are we warranted in considering ourselves by nature incapable of being actuated by such motives as these?

Admit again, that “it is God that worketh in us, both to will and to do of His good pleasure^l ;” that without Him we can do nothing effectual to our salvation; and that “His grace is sufficient for us^m ;” yet, when we are also admonished to “work out our own salvation with fear and tremblingⁿ ;” when we are enjoined to “grow in grace^o,” and to “add to our faith, virtue^p ;”

^h Rom. iii. 23.

ⁱ Rom. v. 12.

^k Rom. v. 18.

^l Phil. ii. 13.

^m 2 Cor. xii. 9.

ⁿ Phil. ii. 12.

^o 2 Pet. iii. 18.

^p 2 Pet. i. 4.

when we are exhorted not to “quench the “ Spirit^q,” nor to “grieve” it; must we not so interpret these precepts, as to preclude any presumptuous reliance either on our own sufficiency or on the irresistible efficacy of the Divine aid? And shall we not fatally deceive ourselves, if, on either side, we press the letter of Scripture against the spirit of it, or render any one portion inconsistent with the rest?

In short, the state of man, in consequence of the fall, has undoubtedly experienced a fearful change. He is, as our Ninth Article expresses it, “very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined “to evil.” He is “very far gone,” “*quam longissime*,” as the authorized translation of the Article renders it; that is, as far, perhaps, as it was possible that such a change could be effected, without totally destroying the original properties of his nature. For he is still a rational being; still has moral, as well as intellectual and sensitive powers; powers inherent, as it appears, even in his present condition. But all these have sustained a grievous injury; a taint of corruption has overspread them; their operations are disturbed; and they are no longer competent

^q 1 Thess. v. 19.

^r Ephes. iv. 30.

to ensure his happiness, or to restrain him from evil. That image of God in which he was created, and which, as has already been shewn, consisted in the perfect adaptation of all his faculties to their respective purposes, and more particularly in that perfection of the intellect and the will, which, until perverted by some extraneous cause, would operate in entire conformity to the Divine will ; that image is now defaced, and no longer exhibits, as it originally did, the clear impress of the Creator's hand. The lineaments of its character are become faint, obscure, confused. It stands in need of the same Divine hand that framed it, to restore to it the lost similitude.

But though the Divine image is thus defaced, it is not utterly destroyed : though man be "very far gone from original righteousness," he has not so entirely lost sight of it, as to have no perception of its value, no desire to attain to it : nor, though he "cannot turn and "prepare himself by his own natural strength "and good works to faith and calling upon "God," is he so bereft of all inclination to do so, as to be insensible to the necessity of making the effort. To suppose any greater change than this, seems to be neither warranted by fact, nor fairly deducible even from

the strongest representations in Scripture of our actual state. On the contrary, when St. Paul says of the natural man, “the good that I would, I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do^s ;” and when again he says, “If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the Law that it is good^t ;” he describes a conflict between the propensity to evil and the approbation of good, which is irreconcilable with the notion that the Divine image is totally lost. According to the apostle’s representation, so much of it at least remains, as to excite abhorrence of sin, and love of goodness ; and although these may be too feeble, without further aid, to overcome the influence of vicious affections, yet that they are not absolutely dormant, much less extinct, within us, is manifest.

This point may perhaps admit of illustration by reference to the immediate effect of their transgression, upon our first parents ; since we can hardly venture to impute worse effects of it to their posterity than to themselves.

No sooner had our first parents committed sin, than it is said, “the eyes of them both were opened^u ;”—they discovered their wretched state, and were “ashamed ;”—they

^s Rom. vii. 19.

^t Rom. vii. 16.

^u Gen. iii. 7.

“ hid themselves from the presence of God ;” and Adam confessed, when called to account for his offence, that he “ was afraid ” to appear before God. Now, whence this discernment of evil, this sense of shame, this dread of punishment ? Do such feelings indicate that total corruption of nature, that insensibility to evil, that antipathy to good, that absolute disinclination to distinguish between right and wrong, which some appear to consider as the invariable characteristic of the natural man ? May we not rather say, that this consciousness of sin, of shame, of sorrow, and of fear, gave token that the sense of virtue and of duty was by no means entirely lost. They saw and dreaded the evil they had brought upon themselves : they felt and deplored the loss of the good they had forfeited. Were these symptoms of the annihilation of every good feeling ? Were they not rather proofs of that compunction, that self-condemnation, which is ever most acute, where the consciousness of obligation is most strong and urgent ? Something to the same effect may also be inferred from the very character and appellation of the forbidden fruit. It was called “ the tree of knowledge of good and evil : ” and the tempter’s prediction, that by partaking of it they should obtain that knowledge, was but

too fully verified. Heretofore, they had known *good* only ; now, to their cost, they became acquainted with *evil* also : and the result of their knowledge was this, that misery was the consequence of the one, as happiness had been of the other. Yet neither does this imply an insensibility to the distinction between them. Rather it appears to have quickened their apprehensions in this respect, though disabled from averting the evil brought upon them.

Nevertheless, it by no means follows, that because we do not acknowledge the total extinction of the Divine image in man, we therefore suppose him to be now capable of attaining the proper end of his being, or of recovering what he has lost, by his own unaided efforts ; or, in other words, that he does not stand in need both of redemption and of sanctification. Adam appears instantly to have felt that he had no power of himself to remove the evil he had incurred. His very nature was changed. Evil now formed a part of it. It was not simply the one transgression that was to be expiated, but an incalculable train of future transgressions, which he was no longer able, as before, to escape. Hence his case was become desperate. The necessity, therefore, of a remedy, which could only be provided by the mercy of his Creator,

is scarcely less apparent on this view of man's fallen state, than on that which ascribes to him nothing but unqualified malignity of purpose, the disposition of an irreclaimable fiend, rather than of a being yet reserved for further probation.

In this general conception of the subject it is safer to rest, than to attempt to unravel all the intricacies in which it has been involved. If we can discern enough to convince us that God was the Author of whatever was originally *good* in our nature, or of whatever yet remains of good in it; if we can also discern that whatever of *evil* has been introduced, is the work of man himself opposing the will of his Maker, or of a tempter instigating him to his misery and ruin; then will the divine attributes stand clear of any just suspicion, and the cavils of the profane and thoughtless be put to silence. More especially, if that same infinitely wise and gracious Power, who first created man for happiness and perfection, has interposed to rescue him from destruction, and has afforded him the means of rectifying the obliquities of his nature, and recovering his lost privileges; a theme of admiration is presented to us, even greater than that which preceded the evil we deplore. For if it be a nobler height of power and of goodness to

bring good out of evil, and to seek and save that which is lost, than to preserve or reward those who need no such extraordinary exercise of benevolence, then is *redemption* (to us, at least,) so much more stupendous a proof of both, than even creation itself.

Under such a representation, the contrast between man's fallen and his primeval state loses so much of its harsher features, that we are enabled to contemplate it without despondency or dejection. The gloom that surrounds it is so irradiated by the beams of heavenly consolation, as to open to us fresh sources of gratitude and praise. We see the hand of infinite power stretched forth to aid the weak and helpless. We hear the voice of infinite wisdom calling man from the error of his ways, and directing him to the path of life. We trace with wonder that union of justice with mercy, which, in the very act of vindicating its injured claims, provides the means of reconciliation and acceptance. In a word, we recognise, throughout the whole of the proceeding, the Apostle's forcible representation, "where sin abounded, grace did
" much more abound : that as sin hath reign-
" ed unto death, even so might grace reign
" through righteousness unto eternal life, by
" Jesus Christ our Lord *."

* Rom. v. 20, 21.

For this view of the subject, however, let us never forget that we are indebted wholly to the light of divine revelation. Cheerless and hopeless were the prospect which would otherwise be set before us. But, “through the
“tender mercy of our God, the day-spring
“from on high hath visited us, to give light
“to them that sit in darkness and in the
“shadow of death, and to guide our feet into
“the way of peace^y.”

^y Luke i. 78, 79.

SERMON IX.

COLOSS. iii. 9, 10.

Ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.

THERE are three different states in which the nature and condition of man claim our special consideration. The first is his *primeval* state, while he retained in full vigour that image of God in which he was originally created, and was endowed with all the perfections suitable to his rank in the scale of moral being. The second is his *fallen* state, when, in consequence of his transgression, that divine image was defaced and despoiled. The third is his *redeemed* or *regenerated* state, in which his nature is so far rectified and restored, as to obtain for him new hopes and privileges, and to reinstate him in the Divine favour.

Respecting his primeval and his fallen state, observations have been made in two

preceding Discourses, intended, not only to explain and vindicate the scriptural representation of them against erroneous persuasions, but also to direct our thoughts to the value and the necessity of that redemption, by which the evils of the fall are removed or mitigated, and a new covenant proposed, adapted to man's present exigencies. It remains now to take a view of him in this redeemed or regenerated state; to consider what are its peculiar privileges and benefits, what change it is designed to produce in his nature and condition, and by what means it operates to render that change effectual.

The words of the text lead us directly to the contemplation of these points. They seem intended by the Apostle to suggest a comparison of man's condition under the Gospel, both with that of his fallen, and that of his original state. "Ye have put off the old man with his deeds;" that is, ye have renounced the evil propensities, the vitiated affections, natural to you as the posterity of fallen Adam; "and ye have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of Him who created him;" in other words, ye are made partakers of that grace and mercy by which ye may become, as it were, *new men*, attaining to some resem-

blance of that Divine image, in which Adam was at first created.

It has already been shewn, that man was originally created for immortality, and made capable of fulfilling the conditions on which that gift was suspended, by such perfect endowments, intellectual and moral, as were sufficient to preserve him in a state of innocence and integrity. It has been shewn also, that, on the breach of those conditions he lost his title to immortality, became subject to death, and received a taint of corruption and infirmity, which rendered it impossible for him to resume the pure and spotless character he had before sustained.

With reference to these circumstances, the Gospel is represented as a new creation of man, conveying to him remission of sins and the gift of eternal life, and repairing the injury done to his mental and spiritual faculties, so as to render him a fit object of the Divine acceptance. These benefits are usually distinguished by the terms *regeneration*, *justification*, and *sanctification*, terms authorized by St. Paul's usage of them, and comprising all that relates to our present subject.

1. The word *regeneration* occurs but twice in the New Testament, and once only with reference to this subject, in that passage of

St. Paul's Epistle to Titus, in which he speaks of our being "saved by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost^a." But expressions equivalent to this are of frequent recurrence. To be "born again;" to be "born of God;" to be "born of the Spirit;" to be a "new creature," and a "new man;" are familiar phrases with our Lord and his Apostles, and evidently betoken the same as the word *regeneration* in the passage just recited.

These phrases have a perfectly clear and intelligible meaning, so far as they contrast the state of a Christian with that of a person who has no title to the hopes and privileges of the Gospel; but it is difficult, without reference to such a contrast, to perceive either their force or their propriety. If man in his fallen state differed in no respect from man in his original state, we might well ask with Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" How "can a man be born again?" What can such expressions as these signify? But when we understand that the Christian redemption delivers us from a state of bondage and corruption to a state of spiritual freedom and holiness, there appears nothing forced or extravagant in this figurative language. They who embrace the faith of the Gospel enjoy

^a Titus iii. 5.

hopes and expectations which cannot enter into the thoughts of those who reject its truths, or are unacquainted with them. They have new views of human life and of human nature, new desires, new principles and motives of action. So opposite are the characters of the parties in these respects, that our Saviour contrasts them as light and darkness: the one he calls "the children of this world," the other, "the children of light." "That," says he, "which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit^b;" denoting a general change in the disposition and faculties of man, on his admission into the Christian covenant. There is then bestowed upon him, as is alleged in our baptismal service, "that thing which by nature he cannot have." He is made "a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." The two last benefits are the consequence of the first. In his primitive state of innocence he bore a filial relation to his Creator, and was assured of a blissful inheritance. Both these privileges he lost by his transgression. Both are restored to him through faith in the Redeemer.

2. The next great change thus wrought in

^b John iii. 6.

man is that which is expressed by the term *justification*.

This term, as applied to the Christian covenant, evidently denotes nothing more than remitting the sentence of condemnation. It cannot imply a declaration of the *innocence* of the party accused; for, in that sense, as the Psalmist declares, “can no man living be “justified^c ;” and St. Paul affirms, both of Jews and Gentiles, “that they are all under “sin,” and are “become guilty before God^d.” Nevertheless, with reference to man’s original state of righteousness on the one hand, and to his fallen state of guilt and unrighteousness on the other, the penalty of the latter is taken off, and the benefit of the former, upon certain conditions, restored. The *immortality* also which he had forfeited is re-assured to him, though not without submitting to that previous but temporary dissolution, which was irrevocably confirmed by the sentence passed upon Adam, “Dust thou art, and unto “dust shalt thou return^e.” Thus, though “the wages of sin is death,” yet “the gift “of God is eternal life^f.” Everlasting bliss, a state of full and perfect happiness, is promised as the ultimate consequence of this

^c Psalm cxliii. 2.

^d Rom. iii. 9, 19.

^e Gen. iii. 19.

^f Rom. vi. 23.

justification ; although the penal sentence of the Almighty fails not to be executed, in that labour and sorrow which, more or less, in this present life, is the portion of all the sons of men.

This justification, however, is not absolute, but conditional. It is bestowed by the free grace, or mercy, of God ; since of right no man could demand it : and it is bestowed for the sole merits of HIM “who was delivered “for our offences, and was raised again for our “justification^g.” Still it is *conditional*. It does not take effect without faith in the Redeemer, without repentance of sins past, without obedience for the future. And though it is said that, by faith only we are justified, this is evidently to be understood either of faith in its most enlarged acceptance, as inclusive of repentance and obedience, or of faith as the instrument of embracing the offer of salvation ; by the acceptance of which offer we become pledged to the fulfilment of whatever is required of us to render it effectual.

In man’s state of innocence there was no room for such a justification as this ; there was no need of it. Before he had transgressed he needed not repentance nor pardon. He lay under no condemnation ; no charge

^g Rom. iv. 25.

was brought against him ; therefore no acquittal was wanted. The original righteousness which adhered to him superseded the necessity of imputative righteousness. “ This “ do, and thou shalt live,” was the simple condition of the first covenant in Paradise ; and so long as that remained unviolated, there were no defects to supply, no evils to remove, no propitiation or intercession called for, to assure him of uninterrupted and perpetual bliss.

In his fallen state, justification indeed was wanted, but could not be found. Man confessedly a culprit, and unable to vindicate his own claims to the Divine acceptance, sought in vain for the means of escape from merited condemnation. His “ iniquities had separated “ between him and his God^b ;” he “ waited for “ light, but behold obscurity ; for brightness, “ but he walked in darknessⁱ.” He “ looked “ for judgment, but there was none ; for salvation, but it was far off from him^k.” His *faith* had no object on which to repose its confidence ; *repentance* could not wash away the stain of guilt ; *obedience* for the future could not retrieve the error of the past. To the redemption that is in Christ Jesus he owes entirely the free gift of this unspeakable blessing.

^b Isa. lix. 2.ⁱ Isa. lix. 9.^k Isa. lix. 11.

3. The other great privilege of man's redeemed state is *sanctification*.

The injury sustained by the fall could not be completely repaired, nor man's restoration to holiness and righteousness effected, without this additional benefit. In vain would he be "born again" to new hopes, and privileges, and expectations; in vain would he be assured of remission of sins, and an inheritance in life eternal, upon those conditions which the Gospel holds out; unless he were enabled, by other means than those within his own reach, to avail himself of these privileges. In his state of innocence, his conscience was free from the sense of guilt; his faculties were unclouded, unimpaired. When these faculties lost their original energy, and became enfeebled and impaired by the prevalence of evil affections, the balance could no longer be preserved between the understanding and the will. The heathen poet's "*video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*," corresponding with the Apostle's complaint, "The good that I would, I do not; the evil which I would not, that I do¹;" was generally characteristic of fallen man.

Now, although infinite *goodness* had open-

¹ Rom. vii. 19.

ed a way for "plenteous redemption" from guilt and misery, yet how could infinite *holiness* dispense with a conformity to the Divine will? Is it not written, that "he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity^m," and that "without holiness no man shall see the Lordⁿ?" Will, then, the atonement for sins repair all the injuries of the fall? Will the faith that justifies render the believer fit to be a partaker of heavenly promises, without the sanctifying influence that purifies the heart, enlightens the understanding, and rectifies the will?

Surely we may almost presume to say, that the Gospel itself had been incomplete, and the salvation it offers doubtful, had not provision been made for this exigency of our nature. To separate the reward of holiness from holiness itself, the enjoyment of bliss from the dispositions requisite to its enjoyment, is a solecism hardly to be affirmed of infinite purity and truth.

Sanctification, then, as well as justification, is the privilege of man in his regenerated state. By the grace imparted to him he is "strengthened with might in the inner man." The natural bias to evil is powerfully coun-

^m Habak. i. 13.

ⁿ Hebr. xii. 14.

teracted by the imperceptible operation of this heavenly gift. The will, though not irresistibly controlled, is prompted and incited by the suggestion of the most urgent and effectual motives. The intellect, cleared of those mists of prejudice and passion which intercept its views of truth and rectitude, so much the more readily discerns and approves what is good. Restored again to its just ascendancy over the inferior faculties, it resumes its sway, and is with less reluctance obeyed. Thus is the Divine image so far renewed in man, as to enable him to fulfil the great purpose of his being, and to leave him without excuse if he fail of attaining it.

Sanctification thus stands opposed to the corruption of our nature ; as justification stands opposed to the condemnation incurred by transgression. The one cancels the guilt of sin ; the other subdues or restrains the propensity to it. The dread of punishment is removed by justification ; by sanctification, the hope of reward is excited. Both are inseparable from a state of acceptance with God. Both imply, that we have “ put off the “ old man, with his deeds ; and have put on “ the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of Him that created “ him.”

From the foregoing view of the subject, we may now be better enabled to form a general estimate of human nature, and to judge of the comparative changes it has undergone.

The original righteousness of man in his primeval state was the result of that undisturbed and harmonious operation of his faculties, which preserved him in an undeviating course of obedience to the Divine will. What further aids might be vouchsafed to him, by immediate communication from his Maker, is no where revealed. Happiness, however, pure and unalloyed happiness, ensued from this state of moral perfection; together with a certainty of its perpetual continuance, and probably of its future enlargement and increase, on condition of perseverance in the same course.

When this original righteousness was forfeited by man's disobedience, sin took possession of those faculties which before had been swayed by no guidance but that of the Divine will. It took possession of them, and exercised a dominion over them, which the victim of its power, though conscious of the fatal influence and of the consequent misery it produced, was yet unable to overcome; and struggled in vain for emancipation from

the thralldom. Thenceforth, human nature became a compound of jarring and contrary affections, of innate propensities warring with each other, of enfeebled love of good, and strong concupiscence of evil, of domineering appetite, and reason unable or disinclined to assert its rightful superiority. By a being so constituted, neither goodness nor happiness could be attainable. Not only would the evil continually overbalance the good within him; but even his better actions and his better affections would partake so much of his inherent infirmity, as to fall far short of that measure of excellence which would satisfy his own sense of duty, and still further short of that which could abide the scrutiny of an all-righteous and omniscient Judge. Thus in every son of Adam is original righteousness so obscured, so depressed and debased by original sin, as to be incompetent of itself to maintain the conflict with its adversary. The consequences we know full well;—self-condemnation, shame, sorrow, disquietude, fear, evils temporal and spiritual, in this life; death, terminating these evils here, but accompanied with a fearful looking-for of judgment in a world unknown.

“Who,” then, says the Apostle, “shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

Let the same Apostle give the answer: "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord^o." Through the Gospel, "life and immortality are brought to light^p." The darkness that overspread them—whether the darkness of ignorance and incredulity, or the darkness of uncertainty with respect to the misery or bliss to be expected—is now dispersed. Under this dispensation, man is as certain now of life and immortality, as when he was at first created to inherit both. Together with this assurance, he is again brought into covenant with his Maker, that he may know on what grounds this blessing, once forfeited, is now restored. The covenant itself is proportioned to his wants and his infirmities, to the change his nature has undergone, and to the increased difficulties with which he has to contend. If spotless innocence, if unsinning perfection, were the terms of this covenant, then were it necessary that man should literally be created anew, to enable him to fulfil them. But the Gospel contemplates man as he now really is, not only as liable to sin, but actually an offender; not only as accessible to temptation, but as unable, without superior aid, to resist or to escape from evil. Its whole system is adapted to

^o Rom. vii. 24, 25.

^p 2 Tim. i. 10.

this view of his circumstances and condition. It flatters not his vain philosophy; it encourages no fallacious notions of his natural perfectibility; it offers no empirical expedients for his spiritual maladies.

The conditions of this covenant point both to what man was intended to be, and to what he actually is. In the first covenant made with him in paradise, *faith* was an implied, if not an express condition;—faith in the promise of life annexed to obedience, and in the threatening of death annexed to disobedience. And this is now the basis of the Gospel dispensation, or rather, of that second covenant which was made with man immediately after his fall, and which continues in force from thence to the end of the world; having changed only in its circumstances, with the varying circumstances of mankind. With the Patriarchs, it was faith in the general promise of a future Redeemer. With the Jews, it was faith in a Redeemer, still future, but more distinctly revealed and made known by type and prophecy. With Christians, it is faith in a Redeemer already come, who hath personally fulfilled all righteousness, who hath made one effectual propitiation for the sins of the whole world; and who ever liveth

to make intercession for us at the throne of grace.

Again, *obedience*, no less than faith, is attached to both covenants, before and since the fall. Under every dispensation, this is still an unceasing obligation. It may vary in its circumstances, but in principle it is the same. The creature can never be absolved from duty to his Creator, can never plead a will or purpose of his own, at variance with the will of infinite perfection.

But while faith and obedience both equally belong to man in his original and in his fallen state, there is a manifest difference with respect to his capability of fulfilling these requisitions in the one state and in the other. Perfect powers and defective powers, though subject to one and the same principle of action, cannot attain to the same practical perfection : nor will the same measure be meted by an all-merciful and righteous Judge to corruption and to incorruption, to the weak and to the strong, to the being of unimpaired faculties, and to the being labouring under infirmity and disorder. *Repentance*, therefore, is graciously admitted in the one case, to supply the want of that unsinning obedience requisite in the other. But even this re-

pentance, as well as the faith and obedience still exacted from fallen man, becomes meet for the Divine acceptance, only through that pervading influence of the Holy Spirit, which is requisite to render either of them fit offerings at the throne of grace.

The general result is this. Man's condition now is a mixed condition of hope and fear, of trial and discipline, of preparation and of conflict. His redemption does not exempt him from the evils of mortality: his regeneration does not remove him from the assaults of temptation, or the dangers of sin. The corruption of our nature "doth remain," says our ninth Article, "yea, in them that are "regenerated." The body of sin is never totally destroyed, while we continue in this mortal state. But its dominion is shaken, and may be overthrown. "Greater is he "that is in you," saith St. John, "than he "that is in the world^q." An invisible power upholds us in danger, consoles us in tribulation, gives us resolution and perseverance. But the responsibility is with ourselves. To us, as to the Israelites of old, may be addressed the awful warning, "I call heaven and earth to record this day against "you, that I have set before you life and

^q 1 John iv. 4.

“ death, blessing and cursing : therefore choose
“ life^r.”

This is what Christian philosophy teaches of man. Here are no dreams of human perfectibility, incongruous with nature and with fact ; no dark and mysterious speculations, injurious to the perfections of the Creator. Enough is revealed, to prove that man has never ceased to be the object of God’s benignant regard ; that the measure of favour, of help, of compassion towards him, from his Maker, has always been in proportion to his circumstances and his exigencies ; nay, that even his liability to penal judgments is intended to operate for his good. Under such rule and guidance, there is no room for presumption or for distrust. “ Our sufficiency is
“ of God^s.” But that sufficiency being vouchsafed to us, what must be the consequence if we abuse it to our destruction ? The whole practical conclusion is summed up in the Apostle’s exhortation :—“ Work out your own
“ salvation with fear and trembling : for it is
“ God that worketh in you, both to will and
“ to do, of His good pleasure^t.”

^r Deut. xxx. 19.

^s 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^t Phil. ii. 12.

SERMON X.

GALATIANS iii. 19.

Wherefore then serveth the Law? It was added, because of transgressions, till the seed should come, to whom the promise was made.

LARGE and comprehensive views are necessary of the work of man's redemption, to enable us to form just conceptions of its real character. The want of these has often occasioned great mistakes, and given advantage to the infidel and the scoffer; whose attempts to bring revealed religion into discredit are usually grounded upon partial or imperfect apprehensions of the system it presents to our contemplation. Such objections can only be removed by a fuller development of its great design, by exhibiting the several parts of it in connection with each other, and by elucidating the purpose which each separate portion appears to have answered in subserviency to the whole.

The course of reasoning pursued by St.

Paul, in combating the prejudices of the Jews against the Christian dispensation, will confirm the truth of this remark. The main object of his Epistle to the Galatians is to shew that the Jews had greatly misconceived the Divine purpose, in giving them that Law under which it was their pride and their boast to have lived. He contends that although the Law was unquestionably of Divine authority, and in itself was "holy, just, and good;" yet, from its very nature, and from its declared intent, it could neither be of perpetual nor of universal obligation; but was evidently preparatory to some ulterior dispensation of a more comprehensive nature. From the Scriptures of the Old Testament he proves, that the necessity of faith in the promised Redeemer was announced antecedently to the Law of Moses; that Abraham was justified by faith in the promise which God had made to him, "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed^a;" a promise including the Gentiles as well as the Jews;—moreover, that the Mosaic Law had no inherent efficacy to the pardon of sin, but rather pointed out the necessity of some other provision for that purpose;—that it was a Law of rigid justice, entailing a curse upon the

^a Gen. xxii. 18.

violation of any of its precepts ;—that there had been no actual redemption from that curse, until that which was wrought by Christ ;—and that the redemption wrought by Him was the fulfilment of the very promise made to Abraham, four hundred and thirty years before the giving of the Law ; which promise could not possibly be disannulled by the Law itself, being, equally with that Law, of Divine authority.

But lest this view of the subject should seem to derogate from the worth and excellency of the Jewish dispensation, the Apostle sets forth, in the words of the text, the real purpose for which it was ordained ; a purpose, in every respect worthy of its Divine Author, yet affording a decisive proof that it was now no longer in force ;—“ Wherefore, “ then, serveth the Law ? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should “ come, to whom the promise was made.”—“ It was added ;”—the Law was engrafted upon the promise, not substituted in its stead. The promise was to “ all the nations “ of the earth ;” a reiteration of the still earlier promise made to our first parents, that “ the seed of the woman should bruise the “ serpent’s head^b ;” a promise including the

^b Gen. iii. 15.

whole human race. The Law, therefore, whatever might be its special purpose, could not supersede that solemn engagement which the Almighty had previously declared he would fulfil, for the general benefit of mankind.

In this simple but comprehensive statement the Apostle gives us a key to the whole Jewish dispensation.

The Law was mainly of a twofold description, *moral* and *ceremonial*. The *moral* part of it was, with respect to its general principles, of far more ancient date than the time of Moses. It was coeval with man's creation. It was co-extensive with the whole race of mankind. It was the law by which Enoch is said to have "walked with God^c," and Noah to have been "a just man, and perfect in his generations^d." The same law St. Paul states also to have been in a certain sense known to the Gentile world, being "written in their hearts," and their consciences "accusing or excusing them^e," according as they adhered to its dictates or departed from them.

The Ten Commandments, promulgated at Mount Sinai, can hardly (in substance at least) be said to form an addition to that Law. They may rather be regarded as a solemn re-

^c Gen. v. 22.

^d Gen. vi. 9.

^e Rom. ii. 15.

cognition of those first principles on which every moral obligation was originally founded. They contain, in a summary the most brief and comprehensive that can well be conceived, a perfect outline of man's duty in relation to his Maker, and to his fellow creatures. They include, moreover, the prohibition of evil concupiscence, as well as of evil deeds ; exercising a dominion over the hearts and thoughts of men. Hence they are substantially as binding now as heretofore ; nor has there ever been a period when mankind were not, according to their measure of knowledge and information, responsible for their observance.

There are, however, no existing records of any such express rule of duty having been authoritatively delivered, before the giving of the Law at Horeb. What the Jews affirm respecting the seven precepts of Noah rests on no clear historical evidence ; and could at most have no other than traditional authority, wanting the stability and permanency of a written law. The prevailing and increasing corruption of mankind, from the deluge to the time of Moses, affords sufficient proof, that "because of transgressions," some more solemn declaration of the Divine will had become necessary. Notwithstanding the tremendous destruction of the antediluvian

world, and the renewal of the covenant of promise to Noah, “the earth was again filled “with violence^f.” Hence arose the restriction of that covenant, for a while, to one particular people, who, being trained under the immediate guidance of the Almighty, were to afford in their history and conduct demonstrative evidence of His supreme authority as moral Governor of the world.

Abraham, the progenitor of this chosen race, was specially called for this purpose; that through him and his posterity the worship of the only true God might be preserved, and the promised blessing conveyed to the rest of mankind. To this peculiar people the world at large were indebted for such a knowledge of revealed religion, and such expectations resulting from it, as could not otherwise have been attainable. Yet, at no distant period from the commencement of this dispensation, the very people thus selected became tainted with the general corruption. Then it was, that Moses was raised up to be their ruler and deliverer; commissioned not only to emancipate them from a galling yoke of bondage, but also to promulgate a Law, accompanied with the most awful manifestations of the Divine presence, and

^f Gen. vi. 11.

administered under such sanctions as nothing less than Divine power could have carried into effect.

This Law, however, even as to its moral purpose, had many provisions specially adapted to the exigencies of that people to whom it was more immediately given. It was framed to correct the evil propensities they had already imbibed, and to form a barrier against the mass of impiety and immorality every where prevalent around them. Hence the rigorous penalties by which it was enforced, and that unmitigated execution of its penal enactments, which led the Apostle to call it a “ministration of condemnation^g.” Thus the Ten Commandments became an authorized standard of duty, which none could violate without self-conviction. In this respect, the Law operated as a powerful antidote to transgressions. It shewed to God’s chosen race, and through them to other nations also, the perverseness and iniquity of their ways. It manifested the Divine displeasure towards sin of every kind, and especially the sins of idolatry and apostasy. It moreover taught those who relied on the ancient promise made to the Fathers before the giving of the Law, that the same God who in

^g 2 Cor. iii. 9.

infinite mercy had made that promise, was also infinite in justice and in power, terrible in his judgments, and not to be disobeyed with impunity.

Let us now consider the application of the Apostle's declaration in the text to the *ceremonial* law ; which also was added "because
" of transgressions."

The ceremonial Law had two chief objects ; to preserve the Jews from the idolatry and superstitions of heathen worship ; and to prepare them, by a typical and figurative service, for the acceptance of that one great atonement for sin to be effected by the promised seed.

The whole history of the Jewish people proves them to have been exceedingly prone to idolatry, and to have had an excessive fondness for external pomp and ceremony in matters of religion. Their long abode in Egypt, and their subsequent intercourse with the Canaanite nations, whom they were sent forth to exterminate, left impressions of this kind upon their minds which seem never to have been entirely effaced. To wean them from these dangerous propensities, to fix their religious affections upon the only proper object of devotion, to render their attachment to symbolical rites instrumental to their in-

struction in spiritual truths, and to preclude them, by imperative restraints and prohibitions, from any intercommunity of worship with the neighbouring nations, was manifestly the purpose of this ritual.

Different opinions have, indeed, been entertained as to the Divine proceedings in this respect. Some have supposed the ritual itself to have been, for the most part, adopted from Paganism, and transferred to the Jews, in accommodation to their deep-rooted prepossessions; their heavenly Lawgiver thus condescending to human infirmity, in the very measures intended to detach them from the general corruption that prevailed. This view of the subject has been taken both by Jewish and Christian expositors of high eminence. To others, however, of no less estimation, it has seemed to derogate from the sacred character of this ritual, to ascribe to it so unseemly an origin; and it has been with great strength of reasoning, and great weight of evidence, contended, that the rites of Pagan worship ought rather to be regarded as spurious copies of Judaism, or of some divine originals of still earlier date, than as prototypes of Jewish worship. A discussion of this question would carry us too far from our present purpose. But in whichever way it be de-

cided, the divine authority of the system, as well as its wisdom and its efficacy, stands clear of all reasonable exception. Its authority stands unimpeached, resting upon the miraculous agency by which it was introduced and established. Its wisdom and efficacy are manifested by its results. 'That it was not only admirably adapted to produce the intended effects, but did actually produce them, is indisputable. It not only presented a striking contrast to the Pagan idolatries, both as to the objects of their worship, and the detestable practices with which they were accompanied; but it also rendered a conformity with those practices utterly impossible, without a certainty of incurring the most tremendous penalties.

The other purpose of the ceremonial Law relates to its more immediate connection with the Christian dispensation.

"The Law," says the Apostle, "was our "schoolmaster, to bring us unto Christ^b." It prescribed a variety of ordinances, which, with respect to their full significancy and effect, could only be explained by their reference to that Saviour, that promised seed, whom they mystically represented and prefigured. It set forth in the most striking colours the extent,

^b Gal. iii. 24.

the magnitude, the turpitude and guilt of sin; and it taught, in the clearest manner, the momentous truth, that guilt could only be done away by some vicarious atonement offered up as a propitiation for sin. To every lighter trespass, as well as to more aggravated offences, it applied this leading principle; affording a perpetual commentary on those awful truths, that "God is of purer eyes than
"to behold iniquityⁱ," and that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God^k." To every contemplative mind there was thus afforded a most affecting picture of the misery of man, unless effectual means were provided of reconciliation with God.

The expressions used by St. Paul in characterizing this part of the Mosiac Law are very remarkable. He calls it "the handwriting of ordinances which was against us, which was contrary to us," and which our Lord "blotted out," and "took it away, nailing it to his cross^l." He calls it also "a shadow of things to come, of which the body is Christ^m." By the former expressions were signified the malignity of sin and its condemnation; by the latter, the means of removing that condemnation. Thus did

ⁱ Habak. i. 13.

^k Rom. iii. 23.

^l Col. ii. 14.

^m Col. ii. 17.

the consolations of the Law, on the one hand, mitigate its terrors on the other; while both served to point the attention of the faithful worshipper to that ulterior dispensation of grace and mercy, in which all these ordinances were to receive their final consummation. And hence we may further understand why the Law is sometimes spoken of as a “curse,” and a “ministry of condemnation,” to those who lived under it; and at other times is highly magnified as a token of God’s mercy and favour to his chosen people. Both representations are strictly just. The Law was a dispensation of *judgment* and of *mercy*; of judgment for the condemnation of transgression; of mercy, for the removal of its penalties. It denounced the wrath of God against sin. In its sacrifices, as the Apostle observes, there was “a remembrance again of sins every yearⁿ,” and it could “never make the comers thereunto perfect^o” by virtue of its own efficacy. Nevertheless, it exhibited the symbols and the seals of that pardon and that sanctification, on which the faithful were to rely as pledges of the redemption to be wrought for them by the promised seed. These purposes it is necessary to keep in view, as inseparably connected, in forming

ⁿ Heb. x. 3.

^o Heb. x. 1.

our judgment of this wonderful institution. When thus viewed, we immediately perceive the full force of St. Paul's representation of the hope and consolation enjoyed by those who lived under it; who, as he affirms, "all
"died in faith, not having received the pro-
"mises, but having seen them afar off, and
"were persuaded of them, and embraced
"them ^p."

When, therefore, we find the same Apostle speaking of the ordinances of the Law as "weak and beggarly elements^q," and declaring it to be "annulled," "for the weakness and
"unprofitableness thereof^r," we must understand the observations as addressed to those only who insisted upon its inherent efficacy and perfection, without reference to Christ; or who deemed the observance of it necessary to salvation, even after its purpose had by HIM been accomplished. But the Apostle is far from depreciating any of its ordinances, when viewed in connection with the Gospel. He speaks of circumcision as "the seal of the
"righteousness of faith^s." He represents the passover to have been a symbol of redemption through the blood of Christ. He raises the dignity of the Levitical sacrifices, by asserting

^p Heb. xi. 13.

^q Gal. iv. 9.

^r Heb. vii. 18.

^s Rom. iv. 11.

them to have been figurative of our Lord's expiatory sacrifice upon the cross. He exalts its priesthood, by shewing its analogy to our great High Priest and Mediator, "who ever "liveth to make intercession for us^t." In some even minute particulars, he dwells upon the correspondence of type and anti-type in the two dispensations, setting before us the whole ceremonial Law in its most interesting point of view, as designed to adumbrate the blessings of the Gospel, and to prepare the disciple of Moses for that greater "Prophet "who should come into the world."

Many of the foregoing observations will be found applicable, in some measure, to the *political* or *forensic* part of the Law of Moses, so far as that is separable from its moral or ceremonial injunctions. The civil polity of the Hebrews extends to every department of social life. It defines rights, privileges, customs, manners. It regulates marriage contracts, parental and filial duties, the relation of masters and servants, ordinary transactions between man and man, the administration of public justice, the rules of civil order and decorum, every thing requisite to preserve the general fabric of society from injury or molestation. It tended also to infuse into the

^t Heb. vii. 25.

minds of the people an habitual reverence for that pure theocracy under which they lived ; to keep them, in that respect more especially, uncontaminated by other nations ; to enforce a strict adherence to both tables of the Decalogue ; and to guard their most venerable institutions from desecration or neglect. Among precepts so multifarious and so specifically detailed, many will undoubtedly be found of universal concern, applicable to all mankind. Others will no less evidently appear to have been of a more restricted character, limited to that peculiar people, arising out of their singular circumstances, and the purposes for which they were thus placed under the immediate superintendence of the Almighty. The use and design of these can only be discovered by a careful consideration of those purposes. But the whole of the political part of the Law, being essentially interwoven with the moral and ceremonial precepts, may equally be said to have been “ added because “ of transgressions.” It was added, both for the punishment and prevention of offences ; and it prepared the way for that period, when all its minor observances should be superseded by duties and obligations on a far more extended scale.

We may now, therefore, fully enter into the

Apostle's meaning when he says, "the Law " was added because of transgressions, until " the seed should come to whom the promise " was made." It was an intermediate dispensation between the giving of the promise and the fulfilment of that promise, shewing most clearly, by the very nature of its enactments and provisions, the guilt of sin and the necessity of a Redeemer. It inculcated these highly important lessons. It prefigured also that better dispensation which was to follow it: and under the direct operation of a Divine Power visibly carrying on the design to its ultimate completion, not only the Jews themselves, but all who attained to any knowledge of their history or of their sacred writings, might be made sensible, in some degree, of their own perilous condition, and be led to inquire after that Deliverer, whom the prophet, in contemplation of such a general expectation of his coming, emphatically called " the Desire of all nations ".

Occasion might hence be taken to dilate upon many collateral points connected with the subject; to notice the many fallacies and misrepresentations into which infidel writers are continually betrayed in their attacks upon the Jewish law and history; and also the un-

^u Haggai ii. 7.

successful and unsatisfactory modes by which injudicious defenders have sometimes conducted its vindication. Observations might further be made on the erroneous views which the Jews themselves entertained of their own religion, and their consequent rejection of HIM in whom alone its full purpose was accomplished. Nor might it be unprofitable to animadvert upon those among our Christian brethren, who either unduly depreciate the value and importance of the Jewish dispensation, or themselves adopt certain narrow and contracted notions of the extent of the Christian redemption, savouring more of a Jewish than a Christian spirit. But it must suffice barely to have suggested these topics, and leave them to your own reflections.

To them, however, who duly reverence both the Law and the Gospel, as proceeding from one and the same source of infinite Wisdom and Goodness, no stronger proof will be wanted than that which the consideration of this subject affords, to assure them that “he is “faithful who hath promised^x,” and that the Gospel of Christ is indeed “the power of “God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the “Greek^y.” Contemplating each system as

^x Heb. x. 23.

^y Rom. i. 16.

connected with the other, and both as co-operating for the general benefit of mankind, they will thankfully acknowledge that “the kingdom of heaven is now opened to all believers;” and that the great charter of our salvation has no exceptions, no reservations, “no respect of persons,” either as to acceptance or rejection, but such as necessarily result from the performance or non-performance of its covenanted conditions. For, “in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with HIM^z ;”—and wheresoever these “glad tidings” are made known, there is the foundation laid for promoting “glory to God in the highest, and “on earth peace, good-will towards men.”

^z Acts x. 35.

SERMON XI.

MATTHEW v. 17.

Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

THE universality of the Christian dispensation is that great leading feature in its character, which distinguishes it, not only from every false religion, but also from every subordinate revelation of the Divine will with which it is itself connected. It is that, by which we recognize it in every stage of its existence; by which we trace it throughout the earliest as well as the latest communications of the Almighty with mankind; and which so well accords with the Apostle's forcible expression, when he declares the blessed Author of this gracious system to be "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever^a."

^a Heb. xiii. 8.

A difficulty, however, arises, in reconciling this its acknowledged characteristic, with those temporary or local dispensations of revealed religion which lay equal claim to a Divine original. How will it accord with the grant of special religious privileges to certain favoured individuals, families, or nations? How, in particular, shall we account for the continuance, through a long series of ages, of a peculiar system of faith and worship, exclusively appropriated to one race of people, chosen to be the depositaries of God's will, and distinguished from the rest of mankind by manifold tokens of His signal favour and protection?

This difficulty is removed, by shewing, (as has been attempted in a former Discourse,) that such temporary or partial dispensations were not detached or entire systems in themselves; but were constituent parts of one vast and comprehensive design, with which they were essentially interwoven, and from which their chief importance was derived. Considered thus as necessary adjuncts to that great purpose, far from clashing with its main object, or derogating from the consistency of its Divine Author, they exalt both the one and the other in our estimation, by enlarging our conceptions of that omniscience and om-

nipotence so wonderfully manifested throughout the whole procedure.

But, when the relative use, the comparative value, and the harmony of these several parts of the system have been thus adjusted; another difficulty presents itself, which has sometimes proved a stumblingblock to prejudiced or negligent observers. Whatever has received the sanction of the Divine will, derives from that single circumstance an authority never to be overthrown. And as nothing can supersede the Divine will, so can that will never be at variance with itself. The Law which it has once promulgated, it will never disown. That which it has declared to be "holy, just, and good," it will never suffer to be set at nought. "God is
"not a man, that He should repent. Hath
"He said, and shall He not do it? Or, hath
"He spoken, and shall He not make it
"good^b?" If then, any particular dispensation of revealed religion be evidently of Divine original, can it be otherwise than of perpetual obligation? Can it be annulled or invalidated by any authority whatsoever, without an impeachment of the Divine perfection and immutability? This is the sum of certain objections urged by unbelievers against

^b Numbers xxiii. 19.

the Divine authority either of the Jewish or of the Christian religion, or of both. The Jew alleges it against the Christian; the infidel, against the Christian and the Jew. Nor would the difficulty be easily surmountable, if it could be proved that the two religions were contradictory to each other, or that there was even any hostile competition between them.

Our Lord, as if in anticipation of such objections, declares, in the very first Discourse delivered to the multitude that surrounded him, "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." So positive a declaration admits not of compromise or evasion. The antithesis is too clear to be misunderstood, too strong to yield to any subtleties of reasoning. Neither by Himself, nor by His authority, could that ever have been brought to pass, which He so unequivocally disclaims.

How, then, shall this declaration be rendered consistent with that actual cessation of the Law which subsequently took place? that cessation, which not only appeared to follow as a natural and necessary consequence of embracing the Christian faith in its full extent; but was also declared by his Apostles

to have been the manifest intention of its Divine Author?

To explain this matter satisfactorily, we must first ascertain the full and precise import of our Lord's declaration; and then see how it concurred with what eventually took place.

The whole force of our Lord's declaration evidently turns upon the contrast between *destroying* the Law and *fulfilling* it. If He, in his own person, accomplished its entire design; if He did that, without which the Law itself could not have effected its intended purpose; then he could in no proper sense be said to destroy it. On the contrary, it should in that case rather be said that He brought it to perfection; that He gave it the most direct sanction; confirmed its authority; raised its character to the highest possible degree of elevation; and invested it even with so much greater dignity and importance than otherwise could have belonged to it.

Now, this its accomplishment in the person of our blessed Saviour is established by the clearest evidence.

The records of His life testify His own observance of the Law, even in the minutest particulars. His sermon on the Mount ma-

nifested His reverence for its moral precepts, and conveyed such enlarged expositions of their real spirit and signification, as put to shame the pitiful and evasive glosses of those who nevertheless made an ostentatious display of their scrupulous adherence to the letter of its enactments. His whole deportment corresponded with His declarations in this respect ; and the attempts of His adversaries to convict him of any violation of its precepts constantly recoiled upon themselves. The same regard for its civil and municipal regulations invariably marked His conduct. He neither assumed the privilege, nor intimated a desire, to depart from any of its institutions : nay, He enjoined His disciples to pay all due obedience to those who “sat in “Moses’ seat ;” however reprehensible might be their personal conduct. In the observance of the ceremonial Law, He exhibited the same edifying example. We find Him punctual in the prescribed ritual of the temple and the synagogue ; attendant upon public solemnities ; careful, even in His miracles, to require a strict compliance with its requisitions ; thus proving to His followers, that it was one great purpose of His coming into the world, to be “made obedient unto the Law

“for man,” and so to “fulfil all righteousness,” that not “one tittle of the Law should fail^d.”

But this was not the only sense, nor indeed the most important, in which His declaration was made good. He fulfilled the Law, not only by conforming to its precepts and upholding its authority, but by effecting its purpose in such a manner as could have been done by none but Himself. “Christ,” says St. Paul, “was the end of the Law^e.” It was ordained to testify of Him; was introductory to His coming; prefigured what was to be done by him; derived its chief efficacy from faith in Him, the promised seed; and could not attain its main object, until actually accomplished in his person. The whole tenor of St. Paul’s reasoning with the Jews, to prove that the Law was no longer in force, is grounded upon our Lord’s having thus completed its intention, and thereby brought it to a termination. He shews, that what the Law could not do by virtue of its own operation, Christ had done by coming in the flesh; and therefore that to Him was the Law indebted for its full effect. He contends also, that by no other means could the original promise, upon which the Law was

^d Luke xvi. 17.

^e Rom. x. 4.

only engrafted for a special purpose, have been rendered effectual. For the Law, he observes, was not “against the promises of “God^f;” but pointed out the necessity of relying on those promises, and was instrumental to their attainment. Consequently, our Lord in fulfilling the promises, did that which the Law itself had chiefly in contemplation: and had He not done this, the Law (whatever other purposes it might have served of a secondary nature) would as to its chief object have been altogether defective.

By this clue, then, we are guided to the full meaning of our Lord’s declaration in the text: nor shall we find any thing to shake our conviction of its truth, in the subsequent events which occurred under the Jewish dispensation. Our Lord fulfilled its precepts, its ordinances, its types, its prophecies, its whole design. Thus was the charge brought against him of destroying it, effectually refuted. As a necessary consequence of this fulfilment, the use of the Law was, indeed, thenceforth done away. There was now nothing further to be accomplished. The purpose of its existence was answered. The proposed term of its continuance was limited to the period when the promised “seed should

^f Gal. iii. 21.

“come.” That term having expired, it gave way to the more universal dispensation, of which it had been the forerunner.

But the subject may be further elucidated, if we consider more distinctly what is to be understood by the abrogation, or rather the cessation of the Jewish Law, and to what extent it has actually taken place.

In this Law, a distinction is always carefully to be made between the particular and the general purposes to which it was adapted. So much of it as related to the Jews only, could co-exist only with the continuance of that people as a distinct nation; and must necessarily cease, whenever that distinction should be done away. So much of it as was founded on principles common to the rest of mankind, and in unison with the Gospel-covenant, was to be perpetual and unchangeable. For, in point of date, the Gospel-covenant was as old as Adam, and will continue to the end of time. It commenced with the Fall; it was the basis of the Patriarchal covenants; it was carried on by the Law and the Prophets; it was perfected by our Lord Himself; it will receive its final consummation at the Resurrection of the just.

In separating what properly belongs to this enlarged and comprehensive purpose from

that which related exclusively to the Jewish dispensation ; it will be found that the greater part, if not the whole of the moral Law, appertains to the former, and the greater part of the ceremonial and political Law to the latter.

Christian ethics differ in no respect, essentially, from Jewish. A full and ample commentary on the Decalogue is conveyed in the practical instructions of our Lord and his Apostles ; and, when divested of the false glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees, the Mosaic precepts harmonize with the purest maxims of Christian piety and Christian philanthropy. These, therefore, remain unrepealed, and will continue to the end of time with authority undiminished.

Some parts of the ceremonial and of the political Law come also under the same description. Such injunctions, whether of ecclesiastical or civil concern, as involve the essentials of piety, of purity, of justice, or of charity, (and many such there are in the institutions of Moses,) are, in their principle, confined to no particular age or nation, but are entitled to universal observance. These also our Lord and his Apostles have distinctly recognized in the New Testament, and have given them a sanction which transfers them

from the Jewish to the Christian code. They are thus rendered of perpetual obligation.

It is not my purpose to specify particulars in proof of these observations. The general principles on which they rest hardly need illustration ; the particular application of them could only be established by a very lengthened detail. But admitting the principle to be just, we readily perceive in what sense the Law may be said to have ceased from its operation, and in what respect it still continues to be in force.

The Law is no longer either necessary or availing, as it was under Moses and the Prophets, to justification ; Christ having now obtained for the universal Church terms of pardon and acceptance not dependent upon any local or national privileges. The Law can no longer be necessary or efficacious as a system of coercion or restraint ; its temporal sanctions having vanished on the discontinuance of the theocracy which upheld them ; and its spiritual benefits being more than supplied by that better dispensation to which it has given place. Nor is the Law any longer wanted as a distinct code of religious instruction. Those momentous truths which relate to the hope of salvation and eternal life, it taught chiefly by prefigurative emblems, anti-

cipating what was afterwards to be realized in the promised Seed. Accordingly, St. Paul represents the Jews to have been in a state of pupilage, placed “under tutors and governors “until the time appointed of the Father^s ;” but “after that faith is come, we are no “longer under a Schoolmaster^h.”

In these respects the peculiar properties of the Jewish Law have ceased. It resembled a noble stream, which having fertilized and blessed the country through which the providence of God ordained it to pass, has at length reached that point of destination where it is lost in confluence with a mightier mass of waters. The distinctive character of the Law is gone ; and its previous benefits can only now be traced in the progress it made to its junction with Christianity, or in the supplies it contributed to that larger object in which it is now completely merged.

But we shall not do full justice to the value of the Mosaic Law, if we do not observe, that having thus coalesced with the Gospel, it becomes, in consequence, a part of Christianity itself ; nor would Christianity be what it now is, if unaccompanied with the evidences of the Jewish dispensation, or dis-severed from the code of the Hebrew legis-

^s Gal. iv. 2.

^h Gal. iii. 25.

lator. In conjunction with Christianity, that code is still operative and efficient. All its precepts, all its prohibitions, of a general character, now belong to this greater design, and contribute to form that perfect rule of conduct which is no less necessary to the Christian than to the Jew. We have the assurance of salvation under the Gospel, but it includes the stipulation of obedience; and when God promises to be OUR God, we promise to be HIS people. Our Lord fulfilled the Law by performing all righteousness, and by atoning for sin. In both characters we are to receive him; as our Ransom by his death; and in his life, as a Pattern for our imitation. The Holy Spirit, in like manner, exercises a twofold office. He is both a Comforter and a Sanctifier; a Comforter, to uphold us under the consciousness of transgression; a Sanctifier, to shew us the necessity of renewed obedience. So that, though we are not under the Law as opposed to the Gospel, or with reference to any of its peculiar and temporary purposes; yet we are under it as connected with the Gospel, and partaking in its main design. It is one thing to allege the perpetuity of the Law itself as a distinct dispensation; it is another thing to allege the perpetuity of those doctrines or precepts

which it taught in common with the dispensations that preceded and followed it. The former might cease; the latter could not. The dispensation itself might vanish; but not so its never-failing testimony to that which shall endure throughout all generations.

Nor are these observations to be limited to the moral part of this Divine institution. The reason of the thing requires that they should be extended to every part, which brings it in contact with Christianity. The Jewish ritual had, indeed, narrower limits, and a more circumscribed operation, than the moral precepts. Yet its reference to the Gospel is exceedingly striking. The doctrine, couched under its mystical ordinances, of atonement for sin through the promised Redeemer, is the same with that which we embrace in the Christian faith, and is of perpetual concern. In whatever manner this doctrine may have been revealed, it can never cease to be a grateful subject of contemplation to every true believer. But while this circumstance greatly enhances the value of the ceremonial Law, it shews that it is no longer wanted for its original purpose. It were indeed a solecism to say that that which was confessedly prefigurative and proleptical in its signification, could continue beyond the period of its ful-

filment. The remembrance of it might doubtless afford a topic of unceasing admiration to after ages ; but it would necessarily be as of an event already past and gone, to be numbered among the wonders of old time, wrought by the Almighty for the furtherance of his gracious promises.

It is the same also with the political part of the Jewish Law. Some of its institutions were founded on maxims of universal obligation ; others were of a limited character, adapted to that peculiar people, and framed for temporary purposes. None but Antinomians or fanatics will contend that the former have vanished with the latter ; and thence infer, that all the rights of magistrates, of war, and of property, are swept away with the Jewish economy. None, on the other hand, but persons of almost equally weak judgment, will imagine that all the latter are still in force, and that Christian states ought now to be regulated by the peculiarities of the Jewish government. If the former class of visionaries were right, many of the soundest maxims of general jurisprudence might be set at nought. If the latter, many regulations of merely local or occasional importance, irrelevant to other times and circumstances, might be perpetuated to no useful

end. But the rule of judgment here is not difficult, if there be no sinister bias to counteract its operation. Compare the Old and the New Testament together. Whatever precepts or observances of the Old are recognized as general and permanent, and confirmed as such, in the New, belong doubtless to the Christian as well as to the Jew. Whatever appertains exclusively to Judaism has either ceased with that dispensation, or it is now so identified with Christianity as to be no longer distinguishable from it. Whatever was in its own nature changeable, might undergo a change without any imputation on the unchangeable perfections of Him who ordained it: and if God himself had *ordained* that it should be temporary, not perpetual, then the immutability of his own purpose would require that the change should take place. Thus the Divine proceedings, both in the introduction and in the extinction of this peculiar polity, are reconcileable with every just conception of an all-perfect Being.

When, therefore, we speak of the abrogation of the Jewish Law, we mean only that which might be more correctly expressed by calling it simply its *cessation* or *expiration*. Certainly we ought to intend nothing to its real disparagement; nothing which can imply

that it had failed of its proper object, or was thrown aside as worthless and inefficient. On the contrary, its cessation was purely the result of its completion by the promised Seed ; and had that not taken place, its main object must have failed. The devout Jew, therefore, who, like aged Simeon, had “ waited for “ the consolation of Israelⁱ,” might with reason hail in the person of our Lord, HIM who displayed in its fullest lustre the real use and value of the privileges so long enjoyed by God’s chosen people. The more highly he had valued these privileges, the more would he rejoice to find the expectations grounded on them at length fulfilled. He might even feel a laudable pride in reflecting, that though the time was now at hand when these privileges would be no longer necessary to those who had been distinguished by them ; yet the dispensation which superseded them redounded so much the more to “ the glory of “ God’s people Israel ;” since to that people had “ pertained the adoption, and the glory, “ and the covenants, and the giving of the “ Law, and the service of God, and the promises ; whose were the Fathers, and of “ whom, as concerning the flesh, CHRIST “ came, who is over all, GOD, blessed for “ ever^k.”

ⁱ Luke ii. 25.

^k Rom. ix. 4, 5.

There is sufficient evidence, then, of the Divine intention that the Jewish Law should be no more than a temporary dispensation ; its cessation, “when the fulness of time should “come,” being anticipated in the very principles on which it was founded. But a matter so necessary to be understood was not left to be inferred only from such internal evidence. It was prophetically announced, both before and after the time of Moses. The patriarch Jacob foretold, that the sceptre and the law-giver should not depart from Judah “till “Shiloh should come¹ ;” clearly limiting their continuance to that period. “Behold the “days come, saith the Lord” to the prophet Jeremiah, “that I will make a new covenant “with the house of Israel and with the house “of Judah ; not according to the covenant “that I made with their fathers, in the day “that I took them by the hand to bring them “out of Egypt^m.” To Daniel it was still more distinctly revealed, that when Messiah should be “cut off,” he should “cause the sacrifice “and oblation to ceaseⁿ.” St. Paul argues from our Lord’s being predicted in the Psalms as a Priest “after the order of Melchisedec,” that the priesthood being changed, there was “of necessity a change also of the Law^o”

¹ Gen. xlix. 10.

^m Jer. xxxi. 31, 32.

ⁿ Dan. ix. 27.

^o Hebr. vii. 12.

to which the Levitical priesthood was attached. The same may be inferred from those numerous passages in the Old Testament which advert to the approach of times when the worship of God should be extended among all nations ; predictions incapable of being verified under the circumscribed operation of the Mosaic Law.

To return, then, to our Lord's declaration in the text ; " I came not to destroy the Law " or the Prophets, but to fulfil them."—He fulfilled both the Law and the Prophets:—He destroyed neither. The Prophets also of the Old Testament, as well as the Law, terminated in him. Did the termination of those prophecies destroy their authority ? Was it not, rather, the necessary consequence of their completion ; the effect of their being fully verified in Him ? In like manner, the Law pointed to CHRIST as its chief end and object ; and in Him that end and object were attained ; how does its termination, then, destroy its character ? That character still remains unimpaired. The Law has done its office ; but is not buried in oblivion. It has long since departed ; but is still had in honour and in grateful remembrance. Christianity owes to Judaism what will never be lightly esteemed by its intelligent advocates :

and the Jew may embrace the Christian faith without abating one tittle of his just veneration for the creed of his forefathers. Both dispensations concur in one and the same divine purpose. The one has not supplanted the other, as a rival institution ; but has followed it in that due order of succession which the divine Founder of both had pre-ordained. The Law has given way to the Gospel, that its own main purpose might more effectually be attained, and the Gospel itself stand forth in full perfection. And in affording such an accession of evidence and of strength to the Gospel, the lustre of that universal blessing was reflected back upon itself.

The necessary cessation of the Mosaic dispensation being thus explained, a subordinate inquiry remains yet to be taken into consideration respecting the *period* of its actual termination. That a considerable interval elapsed between the time when the Law had virtually expired, and that in which its observance was authoritatively prohibited, is evident from the history of the Apostles after our Lord's Ascension. The discussion of this point is reserved for another Discourse.

The two main subjects of our consideration may now be summarily dismissed.

Respecting St. Paul's assertion, that the

Law “was added because of transgressions “till the Seed should come, to whom the promise was made,” it has been shewn, in a former Discourse, that each great branch of that Law had certain peculiarities belonging to it of a temporary character; such as were manifestly not intended to continue longer than until the completion of their purpose in that more enlarged dispensation to which they were introductory. That these were “added” to what had been antecedently revealed of the will of God, “because of transgressions,” was also shewn from the circumstances which rendered such peculiar institutions necessary, both to convince mankind of the guilt and condemnation of sin, and to point out the means by which at a future period that guilt and condemnation were to be removed.

In the present Discourse, it has been endeavoured to place our Lord’s assertion, that he “came not to *destroy* the Law but to *fulfil* “it,” in such a light as may shew its entire coincidence with the Apostle’s representation of the nature and design of the Law itself. The same meaning has been considered as implied in both; that the main purpose of the Law depended upon its fulfilment in Christ, and that its being superseded by the

Gospel did not annul that purpose, or derogate from its importance; but confirmed it in every respect, and stamped upon it an indelible character of Divine authority.

The result of these inquiries should be to increase our veneration both for the one dispensation and the other. More especially should it impress upon us, that however wisely and mercifully adapted any preceding revelations may have been to the exigencies of former times, the full display of infinite perfections was reserved for that complete and final manifestation of the Divine will, under which it is our happiness to live. We can survey, as from a lofty eminence, giving us an entire command of the extensive scene on which these wondrous things have been transacted, the whole plan itself, the development and connection of the several parts with each other, their mutual dependencies, their mutual cooperation, their combined effects. Let not such advantages be lost upon us. Let it not be imputed to us, that we remain as much unaffected by them, as if we had never been placed within their reach. Let them elevate our thoughts and affections to the great "Author and Finisher of our faith," with whom these wonders originated, by whom they were conducted and carried on

from age to age, and in whom they have at last been brought to their perfect consummation.

TO HIM, therefore, who is “Alpha and “Omega, the First and the Last^p,” to HIM, who, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, is “God, blessed for evermore,” be ascribed, as is most due, all honour and glory, might, majesty, and dominion, henceforth and for ever. Amen.

^p Rev. i. 8.

SERMON XII.

ACTS xv. 5, 6.

But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the Law of Moses. And the Apostles and Elders came together for to consider of this matter.

SOME of the prejudices entertained against Christianity by the Jews, on its first promulgation, however unjust or ill-founded, were better entitled to patient consideration, and even to a certain degree of indulgence, than many which, in later times, have been cherished by persons proud of being distinguished as philosophical unbelievers. They had this, at least, to give them plausibility, that they arose out of a professed reverence for Divine authority, and a dread of departing from what had once been clearly attested as the will of God. They did not partake of that rash spirit which sets up hu-

man reason against divine revelation ; but recognised the duty of scrupulously adhering to the very letter of every thing which had borne the stamp of an heavenly origin. And, however erroneous might be the application of this principle, the principle itself is too sacred to be treated with levity or with disrespect.

The devout Jew, whether brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, or in some more humble schools of Pharisaical instruction, was habituated from his earliest infancy to regard the institutions of Moses, and even the traditions of those who sat in Moses' seat, as the dictates of infallible truth. The sacred Law so environed him against every external attack upon his faith, and so effectually precluded the admission of any internal principle which might tend to weaken its authority, that few, perhaps, who had been nurtured under such tuition, deemed it necessary to investigate with much precision either the original purpose of the Law itself, or the limits which necessarily circumscribed its extent and its duration. And this want of attention, however reprehensible, but too much resembles that of many among ourselves, who are Christians rather from habit and from custom, than from that careful examination of the subject

which affords the best security against doubt or error.

We ought not, therefore, to be much surprised, that a large proportion of the first Jewish converts to Christianity manifested a strong propensity to intermingle with it the peculiarities of the Mosaic Law. Convinced, as they appear to have been, of the Divine pretensions of Jesus, and that they had found in Him the very person “of whom Moses in “the Law and the Prophets did write^a ;” they were yet reluctant to yield to Him that exclusive or preeminent authority, which Moses and the Prophets had declared to be His due. They were slow to believe that justification and sanctification were to be obtained by Christ alone, without the continuance of those means of pardon and acceptance which the Law had provided. They could not be prevailed upon to regard that Law but as still in force, with respect to those, at least, who had already been brought within its covenant ; and they were even dissatisfied with the supposition that other nations might be excused from becoming proselytes to Judaism, in order to obtain the full benefits of Christianity.

In considering the important question of

^a John i. 45.

the cessation, or abrogation, of the Mosaic Law, this state of the general feeling of the Jews must not be overlooked. In every dispensation of revealed religion, we may discern the gracious disposition of the Almighty to adapt its provisions to the infirmities and prepossessions of those for whose benefit it was more immediately designed. This disposition our Lord Himself manifested, in his manner of communicating to his chosen disciples, as well as to the multitude at large, some truths, at which they would probably have revolted, if pressed upon them with less caution and consideration. This was His declared reason for so often speaking to them in parables; and for touching sparingly on those points, which the Apostles themselves were not yet sufficiently rooted in the faith to receive. "I have many things," said He, "to say unto you; but ye cannot bear them now^b." These things were to be imparted to them more fully and distinctly, by that gradual illumination of the Spirit, which He promised to send after His departure.

That the discontinuance of the Mosaic Law was one of those points on which the disciples were least able to bear a full and unqualified disclosure, is evident from their

^b John xvi. 12.

conduct on several occasions. Their lofty notions of the Messiah's kingdom clearly indicate that they looked to a vast enlargement of the Jewish polity, not to its extinction or diminution. They expected that other nations would be brought by the great Shepherd of Israel into the Jewish fold; not that they themselves were to become a people dispersed and undistinguished in one universal fold, common both to Jew and Gentile. The sons of Zebedee doubtless coveted honours which they conceived none but an Israelite could claim: and when the whole company of the Apostles interrogated our Lord, after his resurrection, as to the time of his "restoring again the kingdom to Israel," they little expected the dissolution of that polity by which it had for so many ages been upholden. Hence their reluctance to receive the intimations, not obscurely given by our Lord, that the time was approaching, when "not one stone should be left upon another"^d of that goodly temple, which they beheld with unbounded veneration, and deemed to be secured by Divine protection against every possible assault. These mispersuasions tended to create feelings and prepossessions almost

^c Acts i. 6.

^d Matt. xxiv. 2.

as untractable as those that actuated even the bitterest of our Lord's opponents.

A still more decisive proof of this may be traced in the doubts entertained, even after the miraculous occurrences on the day of Pentecost, respecting the admissibility of the Gentiles to a participation of Christian privileges. It was not until the extraordinary vision of St. Peter, and the subsequent conversion of Cornelius the centurion, that the offer of the Gospel appears to have been directly made to any but of the Jewish nation. For his conduct on that occasion, St. Peter was called to a rigorous account by his brethren of the circumcision. Convinced, however, by his recital of the circumstances, that God had indeed "to the Gentiles granted "repentance unto life^e;" the rest of the Apostles thenceforth joined in extending the saving knowledge of the Gospel far and wide. But the question respecting the observance of the Jewish Law still remained undecided by any authoritative declaration. It seems probable, that the Apostles in their respective ministries, no longer imposed this condition upon their Pagan converts; and it is evident, that Paul and Barnabas incurred the vehe-

^e Acts xi. 18.

ment displeasure of some of the Jews, by forbearing to insist upon it. Perhaps the matter was left to the discretion of each individual Apostle, until the occurrence to which the text relates called for their collective judgment, and made it necessary to establish some rule for general observance.

“ Certain men,” says the sacred historian, “ which came down from Judæa, taught the
“ brethren, and said, Except ye be circum-
“ cised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot
“ be saved. When therefore Paul and Bar-
“ nabas had no small dissension and disputa-
“ tion with them, they determined that Paul
“ and Barnabas, and certain other of them,
“ should go up to Jerusalem, unto the Apo-
“ stles and Elders, about this question. And
“ being brought on their way by the church,
“ they passed through Phenice and Samaria,
“ declaring the conversion of the Gentiles:
“ and they caused great joy unto all the
“ brethren. And when they were come to
“ Jerusalem, they were received of the church,
“ and of the Apostles and Elders; and they
“ declared all things that God had done with
“ them. But there rose up certain of the
“ sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying,
“ That it was needful to circumcise them,
“ and to command them to keep the Law of

“ Moses And the Apostles and Elders came
 “ together for to consider of this matter^f.”

Here it is to be observed, that the question propounded was not whether the *Jews* might continue their observance of the Mosaic Law, but whether such observance was necessary to the *Gentiles*: and accordingly, the decision of this council at Jerusalem went no further than to the determination of that point. The determination appears also to have been grounded, not so much upon a general view of the impropriety of combining the peculiarities of Judaism with Christianity, as upon a conviction that the Divine will, with respect to the Gentiles, had been sufficiently manifested by the miraculous success of the Gospel in those heathen countries where this yoke had not been imposed. St. Peter’s convincing argument, “ Can any man
 “ forbid water, that these should not be bap-
 “ tized, which have received the Holy Ghost
 “ as well as we^g?” superseded the necessity of further consideration. They were moved also, (as it is expressly stated,) by Paul and Barnabas, “ declaring what miracles and won-
 “ ders God had wrought among the Gentiles
 “ by them^h.” Accordingly, their decision was prompt and unequivocal. They sent back

^f Acts xv. 1—6.

^g Acts x. 47.

^h Acts xv. 12.

Paul and Barnabas with this definitive judgment :—" It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, " and to us, to lay upon you no greater bur- " then than these necessary things ; That ye " abstain from meats offered to idols, and " from blood, and from things strangled, and " from fornication : from which if ye keep " yourselves, ye shall do wellⁱ." In this decree, none of the peculiar distinctions of the Jewish Law are insisted upon. The restrictions relate either to general principles of moral duty, or to practices which not only would give offence to the scruples of the Jews, but might ensnare the consciences of the heathen themselves. And thus were the Gentile converts released from the dread of that yoke which Pharisaical rigour sought to have laid upon them.

But although this solemn edict, deliberately issued by " the Apostles, and Elders, " with the whole church^k," did not actually extend further than to the liberty which should be allowed to converted Pagans, yet it virtually decided a question of vital importance to the Jews themselves. For the Pharisees, who provoked the discussion, had grounded their complaints against Paul and Barnabas upon the supposed general neces-

ⁱ Acts xv. 28, 29.

^k Acts xv. 22.

sity of keeping the Mosaic Law; without which, they denied the possibility of salvation: "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved¹." Now, if this principle had been admitted by the Apostles, they could not but have insisted upon the Gentiles becoming Jewish as well as Christian proselytes. But this principle being rejected, it followed also, that the Jewish Law was no longer necessary, even to the disciples of Moses. The utmost that could, after this decree, be conceded to the Jews, was a discretionary or a tacit permission, to continue the observance of the Law, although its obligation had evidently ceased, and although its institutions could be no longer attended with their wonted efficacy, as services acceptable in the sight of God.

Thus was the great fundamental question concerning the extent and the perpetuity of the Jewish Law authoritatively set at rest. Thenceforth, we may conceive each Apostle, and each Christian teacher under the direction of the Apostles, unfolding, as occasion offered, the grounds and reasons of this decision, and gradually removing those prejudices which had hitherto obstructed the full progress of the Gospel. Of their labours in this

¹ Acts xv. 1.

respect we have abundant proof in the invaluable writings of the Apostles themselves, addressed to different churches, or distinguished individuals, for their confirmation in the faith.

The difficulties, however, which the Apostles encountered, in endeavouring to eradicate these prejudices, appear to have been very great. It required all the tenderness due to scrupulous minds, to prevent this subject of contention from becoming a source of irreconcilable animosity. St. Paul adverts to these difficulties, when he says, “Unto the
“ Jews, I became as a Jew, that I might gain
“ the Jews; to them that are under the Law,
“ as under the Law, that I might gain them
“ that are under the Law; to them that are
“ without Law, as without Law, that I might
“ gain them that are without Law. To the
“ weak became I as weak, that I might gain
“ the weak: I am made all things to all
“ men, that I might by all means save some¹.” Three remarkable instances of his accommodation to Jewish prejudices are recorded in the Acts of the Apostles:—his circumcising Timothy; his shaving his head at Cenchrea, in fulfilment of a vow made according to the injunctions of the Levitical Law; and his

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 21, 22.

performing a solemn rite of purification at Jerusalem, with four other persons bound by a similar vow. Yet the same Apostle makes his boast of not having circumcised Titus, “because,” says he, “of false brethren, un-
“awares brought in, who came in privily to
“spy out our liberty, which we have in Christ
“Jesus, that they might bring us into bond-
“age^m.”

Nor was St. Paul justly chargeable with inconsistency in these proceedings. It is evident on what grounds he acted, in conforming to the Jewish Law on some occasions, and in departing from it on others. We may collect from his writings on this subject three main principles which governed his conduct in these respects:—1st, That the ceremonial Law being virtually done away, could no longer oblige any person to its observance; 2dly, That since it was no longer in force as a Law, the performance or the omission of it was become a matter of indifference, and in no respect essential to an acceptance of the Christian faith; “circumci-
“sion being nothing, and uncircumcision no-
“thing, but the keeping of the command-
“ments of Godⁿ,” 3dly, That they who insisted upon its being still necessary to salva-

^m Gal. ii. 4.

ⁿ 1 Cor. vii. 19.

tion did in reality abandon the great exclusive privilege of the Gospel salvation by Christ : “ Christ is become of no effect unto “ you, whosoever of you are justified by the “ Law : ye are fallen from grace^o.” These are the points most strenuously urged by the Apostle, in his controversy with Judaizing teachers.

Now these principles, while they entirely accord with those on which the decision of the council at Jerusalem was founded, satisfactorily elucidate St. Paul’s conduct on the occasions which have just been mentioned.

Timothy was born of a Jewish parent ; his mother being a Jewess, though his father was a Greek. Under such a circumstance, it would have been a matter of scandal to the Jews, (whom the Apostle was then especially endeavouring to convert,) if Timothy had not complied with this rite of admission into the Jewish church ; nor is it probable that he would have been suffered to preach among them, without this testimony of conformity to their Law. For a similar reason, St. Paul, being himself brought up a Jew, might deem it expedient to avoid giving offence to his brethren, by any unnecessary departure from Jewish customs in his own personal conduct ;

^o Gal. v. 4.

customs, which though no longer necessary, were yet harmless. But it was not so, in the case of Titus. He was a Greek by both parents; and came under no obligation to the Jewish Law by birth. The only ground, therefore, for insisting upon his being brought into the Jewish fold, must have been the alleged necessity of the Law for justification. But to have acknowledged this necessity, would have been to admit the very maxim already expressly disclaimed, both by the council at Jerusalem and by St. Paul himself. Here, therefore, the Apostle resolutely made a stand; nor would he be moved by any clamours of "false brethren," to sanction a principle destructive of one of the fundamental principles of Christianity.

The circumstances which have been considered may, perhaps, enable us now to form a more accurate judgment respecting those progressive measures, by which it seemed good to infinite wisdom, that the Law should be withdrawn, and the Jews themselves brought to discontinue its observance.

The Law became virtually extinct, (that is, it ceased to have any validity as a distinct dispensation,) on our Lord's departure from this world; when, having accomplished its one main purpose, and fulfilled in it every

particular, he left it nothing more to do. This took place, from the instant when the Saviour of the world proclaimed on the cross, “It is finished,” and “bowed his head, and “gave up the ghost^p.” The veil of the temple was then miraculously rent in twain, in token that there was no longer any separation betwixt Jew and Gentile, in the courts of the Lord’s house; but that one common Atonement, Mediator, and Intercessor, belonged to both. Mankind in general were now, (as the Apostle to the Hebrews expresses it,) to “enter into the holiest by the “blood of Jesus, by a new and living way “which He hath consecrated for us, through “the veil, that is to say, His flesh^q.” The Gospel thus succeeded to the Law, as sun-rise to twilight, or as adult age to infancy. The Law, the Prophets, the types, the figures, having reached their full measure of perfection, retired. “Sacrifice and offering, burnt-offering and sin-offering,” were no longer wanted; because he was come, of Whom in the volume of the book it was written, “Lo! I “come, to do Thy will, O God^r!”—He, who declared, that “the things concerning Him “had an end^s,” and that “not one jot or

^p John xix. 30.

^q Heb. x. 19, 20.

^r Heb. x. 6, 7.

^s Luke xxii. 37.

“ tittle of the Law should pass away, till all
 “ had been fulfilled^t.”

But the eventual abrogation of this Law went on in a different course. It was slow and gradual; accompanied with circumstances which marked, not only great circumspection in the mode of the proceeding, but feelings of respect also and of veneration towards an institution bearing the most unequivocal characters of its sacred origin. ‘The Law came to the termination of its existence, without any apparent efforts to accelerate its dissolution. It was allowed to die a natural death, and (to borrow the expression of a learned foreign Divine) it was buried, as it were, with funeral honours”. The Apostles themselves evidently partook of these feelings. They were reluctant, at first, to dispense with the observance of the Law, even among Gentile converts. This point being decided, they still allowed its observance among the Jews, provided this were not deemed a matter of necessity. But when, at last, this permission was abused; when sects and parties arose, endeavouring to maintain Judaism to the disparagement of Christianity, and inculcating a

^t Matt. v. 18.

^u “ Neque vero etiam præcipites ejectæ, sed sensim, vel
 “ cum honore, sepultæ sunt ceremoniæ.” *Carpzov.*

reliance upon the works of the Law, rather than upon the promises of the Gospel; then, the Apostles no longer hesitated in declaring such adherence to it to be inconsistent with a right apprehension of the Christian faith. And thus the matter appears to have stood, until, by that tremendous event, the destruction of Jerusalem, with the consequent dispersion of the Jewish nation, the providence of God effectually interposed to render the Law itself, as to all its distinguishing peculiarities, utterly impracticable and void.

Ever since that memorable period, not only all the characteristic grandeur of the temple worship has vanished, but with it every thing which rendered the expiatory sacrifices, and the purifications, effective. Its sanctuary, its altars, its priesthood, are gone. Nothing remains but a faint reminiscence of benefits no longer conferred, a spiritless observance of ceremonies, without significance or value. Nor can the Jew point out any reasonable ground of hope, even from his own scriptures, of the revival of that dispensation to which he is still blindly devoted. The only conditions on which the restoration of the Jews to their national preeminence can now be grounded, are those which entirely preclude the continuance of the service to which they

adhere. They must first “look on Him whom “they have pierced,” as their Saviour and Deliverer. They must renounce the righteousness that is by the works of the Law, and acknowledge the righteousness that is by faith. They must relinquish that ritual which had only “the shadow of good things “to come,” and embrace those better promises which realize what their own institutions did but mystically represent.

All that was peculiar to the Mosaic Law having thus necessarily given way, the Law itself, as a distinct dispensation, is now become as useless to the Jew as to the Gentile. Its operation did not cease immediately upon our Lord’s coming, nor was it even diminished during the continuance of his ministry. It remained in full force till after his crucifixion. Even after that event, we find no fixed period prescribed for its formal abolition, nor any compulsory act of authority prohibiting its observance. It appears, therefore, to have been the Divine will, that its actual termination, or rather its general discontinuance, should be the result of those clearer and more enlarged views of the Christian dispensation, which, from time to time, were vouchsafed to the inspired preachers of the Gospel. By these mankind in general,

and the Jews in particular, were to be taught wherein the true value of the Mosaic Law consisted, and in what its real design and use had terminated. No violence was done to ancient prepossessions in favour of what had been justly revered as sacred. Full time for deliberation, full latitude of inquiry, were allowed. By deeper and deeper researches into the scriptures of the Old Testament, by more and more profound reasoning upon their signification, and by daily increasing accessions of light and knowledge from that Holy Spirit which was to "guide them into "all truth," the Apostles, slowly indeed, but successfully, combated those prejudices and those errors, which would otherwise have frustrated the object of their mission. All this was done by means the best adapted to conciliate as well as to correct, to instruct as well as to reprove. "Do we make void the "Law," says the Apostle, "through faith? "God forbid: yea, we establish the Law^x." The great points these teachers constantly laboured to prove, were the harmony of the Law and the Gospel; their mutual dependence on each other, and the mutual support given by the one to the other; the fulfilment, not the destruction of the former by the lat-

^x Rom. iii. 31.

ter ; and the testimony which God had given to both, as the work of one almighty hand.

These points, however, have already been more largely treated in two former Discourses, to which the present may be considered as supplementary only, for the purpose of shewing, still more distinctly, the entire consistency of the Divine proceedings throughout the whole of this wonderful dispensation.

If this purpose has been attained, some main obstacles raised by the infidel and the sceptic may have been removed : and these being removed, minor difficulties will more readily disappear. If the Law shewed the necessity of a Redeemer, and prepared men for his coming ;—if that Redeemer came to fulfil, and did actually fulfil, all that the Law intended ;—and if, in consequence of the one dispensation being thus merged in the other, the Apostles sufficiently proved in their writings and discourses the entire cessation and extinction of all its peculiar institutions :—then we are in possession of some great leading facts and principles, by which the whole system of revealed religion ought to be judged, and its several component parts examined and adjusted. With this clue to our researches, many perplexities may be avoided, many em-

barrassments diminished. Peculiarities in the Mosaic ritual, which the scoffer contemns and derides, may be found to have their appropriate fitness and utility. The Law will derive dignity and importance from the reflected lustre cast upon it by the Gospel: the Gospel will claim additional regard and veneration from the homage which the Law has paid to it. The founders and the preachers of each dispensation will also share in the honours thus ascribed to both. Moses and the Prophets prepared the way for Him “whose shoe’s latchet they were not worthy to unloose:”—Christ and his Apostles bore testimony to what Moses and the Prophets had spoken of him, and enhanced the value of the Law by connecting it with a higher and better system. Even that which to a superficial observer might seem to indicate, on the part of the Apostles, a vacillating and indecisive disposition, halting between Christian and Jewish opinions, with respect to the point which has been considered in this Discourse, appears rather to be the natural and proper result of a desire to maintain the sacred character of both, so as not to compromise the veneration due to either, in adjusting their respective claims.

Two general observations remain to be

made, with a view to our practical improvement of the present subject.

The conduct of our Lord towards his Apostles, and of the Apostles towards their fellow-countrymen, may teach us that there are prejudices which must be treated with lenity, with compassion, and even with respect; that there may be deeply-rooted prepossessions, the result of early habit, of education, of hereditary feeling, which will not bear to be rudely handled; that hasty and violent efforts to eradicate these will avail nothing; that sober and dispassionate reasoning must be blended with authoritative admonition, if we hope to extirpate error without injury to truth. These are the lessons of that charity, which, while it censures the offence, compassionates the offender; which discriminates between wilful and unconscious error; between defects of understanding or of information, and intentional hostility to what is right and good.

But while we are thus taught lenity to the errors of others, we may also learn the no less important lessons of self-correction and improvement. Little will it avail that we enjoy the meridian splendour of the Gospel, if our eyes are closed against those evidences of its truth and perfection which on every side sur-

round us. Little shall we profit by it, if we suffer our faith to be shaken by every petty assailant, or allow its truths to work upon our understandings only, and not upon our wills and affections. The true end of all spiritual knowledge is to influence the heart, and direct the conduct. Every dispensation of revealed religion has had for its object to “turn men from darkness to light, and from “the power of Satan unto God^y.” What shall be said, then, for those who live under this last and most perfect manifestation of the Divine will, if their righteousness neither exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, nor even attains to the ordinary perfection of a virtuous, though unenlightened, Pagan? We may condemn heathen ignorance; we may deride Jewish bigotry and prejudice. But our Lord’s reproof on another occasion will apply to all who vaunt themselves of their superior advantages as Christians, and yet bring forth no fruit to perfection: “The queen of the south shall “rise up in the judgment with the men of “this generation, and condemn them; for she “came from the utmost parts of the earth “to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here: the

^y Acts xxvi. 18.

“men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and behold, a greater than Jonas is here^z.”

“Let him,” then, “that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall^a.” No spiritual privileges supersede the necessity of vigilance; no increase of faith or of knowledge will compensate for neglect of duty. For what says the great Author of our salvation? “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and trodden under foot. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven^b.”

^z Luke xi. 31, 32. ^a 1 Cor. x. 12. ^b Matt. v. 13—16.

SERMON XIII.



JOHN vii. 46.

Never man spake like this man.



ONE main support of the Christian religion is derived from the personal character of our Redeemer; a character, which even infidel writers have confessed to be the most extraordinary, and the most perfect, that either history or fiction has ever set before us. Such an acknowledgment they appear to have felt it almost impossible to withhold, without forfeiting their own pretensions to candour, to discernment, or even to moral rectitude.

The strength of this argument in favour of Christianity consists, however, not merely in the credit due to such a person as our Lord is represented to have been, but in the improbability, if not impossibility, that the representation itself should be otherwise than

faithful. We search in vain for any example in human nature which could suggest such a model to the minds of the narrators; a model, combining such rare perfections, yet so totally free from any extravagant colouring to heighten its effect. Our conception, indeed, of the character is formed, not from any express delineation of it by the Evangelists themselves, but from their simple recital of the actions and discourses which they themselves daily witnessed. From these they leave us to infer what manner of person he was; and by this simple process such a character is brought before us, as none but these writers, nor even these writers themselves, in any other instance, have presented to our contemplation. In every other case, even of men who were messengers from the Most High, there are found intermingled with all their high excellencies of character or office, such shades of frailty and imperfection as, in a greater or less degree, universally characterise fallen man. In this only instance, four plain unlettered men have, without effort, and in a manner the most artless and the most unostentatious, drawn a pattern of perfection, moral and intellectual, infinitely surpassing all that has ever been described or conceived, by historian or philosopher, since the world began.

The words of the text lead us to consider one part only of this extraordinary character; that peculiar energy and wisdom which marked our Lord's conversation and discourses. The chief priests and Pharisees, vexed and enraged at the daily progress of his doctrine among the people, sought to take him by violence. The officers sent for this purpose were, however, themselves overpowered by that eloquence which had arrested the attention of the multitude, and returned, declaring, in excuse for not having executed their commission, "Never man spake like this man." Such was their admiration and astonishment, that they yielded to that reverential awe which sometimes restrains even the worst of men, in the presence of holiness and virtue.

What particular discourse our Lord was then delivering, the Evangelist does not mention. But St. John has recorded a great variety of instances, in which it appears that "his word was with power," and that "he taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes^a." Of those which are related before this occurrence, his conversations with Nicodemus and with the woman of Samaria, his animadversions on the cavils of the Jews when he had healed the impotent man, his

^a Matth. vii. 29.

memorable discourse subsequent to the miracle of the loaves and fishes, and the keen expostulations he addressed to his adversaries, immediately preceding, or, perhaps, at the very time, that these persons came to apprehend him, are particularly deserving of remark; and the whole of St. John's Gospel is almost a continued narration of similar incidents, and of the effects produced by them.

The other Evangelists abound also with proofs of the impression made upon hearers of every description by our Lord's ministry. St. Luke relates, that on his first entrance into the synagogue at Nazareth, when he applied to himself a remarkable passage in the prophecy of Isaiah, "the eyes of all that were "in the synagogue were fastened on him," and they "wondered at the gracious words "which proceeded out of his mouth^b;" again, that "the people of Capernaum were astonished at his doctrine^c;" and that "the fame "of him went out into every place of the "country round about^d." Such also was the impression made by his memorable sermon on the mount. And when we attentively consider the general tenor of his familiar conversations with the twelve Apostles, the nature of his instructions to them in particular,

^b Luke iv. 20, 22.

^c Mark i. 22.

^d Luke iv. 37.

his reproofs and warnings, and his encouraging assurances, to animate their faith, or to remove their prejudices;—when we also advert to his attractive and instructive parables for the use of the multitudes that followed him, and the numberless incidental observations and admonitions addressed both to his disciples and to his adversaries, at the moment when their force would be most deeply felt;—we shall perceive that this admiration was not the mere effect of blind partiality or of undiscerning ignorance on their part, but of an eloquence irresistibly persuasive and convincing, operating with equal energy on the hearts and the understandings of men. This energy we find also increasing as his ministry was drawing to its close. It is told, that after his opponents had been again and again baffled in their attempts to ensnare or to intimidate him, they “durst not ask him “any more questions.” Even of his own familiar disciples it is intimated, that there were certain occasions when their inquisitive dispositions were restrained by the awful dignity of his demeanour, so that “they feared “to ask him of some of those sayings” which gave them the greatest disquietude. Nor can we forget that remarkable instance of the

^c Matth. xxii. 46.

^f Luke ix. 45.

overpowering effect of his presence, when the band of men and officers that came to apprehend him on the eve of his last sufferings, for a moment shrunk from the attempt, “went backward, and fell to the ground^ε.”

From these circumstances we may gather, that there was something in our Lord’s external manner and deportment, as well as in the force and attraction of his eloquence, which commanded more than ordinary veneration, and impressed his hearers with a conviction of his more than human character. But I shall confine myself at present to some brief remarks upon those peculiar characteristics which most distinguished our Lord as a public Teacher, and placed him at an immeasurable distance from all other religious instructors. These I shall consider, first with reference to the *subjects* on which he discoursed ; secondly, to his *mode* of communicating instruction ; and thirdly, to the *effect* produced upon his hearers.

First, let us advert to the *subjects* on which he discoursed.

Some of these transcended the utmost extent of human ability ; some were directly opposed to the strongest prepossessions of his own chosen followers ; some were equally re-

^ε John xviii. 6.

pugnant to the more corrupt propensities of mankind in general : yet all were of universal concern ; all tended to the improvement, the perfection, the happiness of the whole human race.

Our Lord revealed to mankind his own divine nature ; his inseparable union with the Father, and with the Holy Ghost, the Comforter ; the atonement he was to make for the sins of the whole world ; the necessity of a renewal of our nature, and the means of effecting it by the sanctification of the Holy Spirit ; the terms of our acceptance with God ; the remission of sins through his merits and intercession ; and the final recompense, both in body and soul, at the resurrection of the just.

These are subjects absolutely beyond the reach of human discovery ; and whatever had hitherto been even revealed concerning them was comparatively obscure. By our Lord they were first clearly brought to light ; by HIM they were established on a foundation not to be overthrown. To HIM the Spirit was “given without measure.” Without such an authority, these doctrines must ever have remained among the doubtful sayings which human wisdom would in vain have attempted to penetrate.

The duties also resulting from such truths as these could never have been laid down with equal certainty or effect by any inferior teacher. By HIM every duty came recommended and enforced, under new sanctions, new principles, and new motives. That which before had resulted from subtle and precarious reasoning, or plausible conjecture, or traditional opinion only, now issued from an infallible source of truth. What was taught by philosophical instructors as moral rectitude, on the one hand, or moral turpitude, on the other; was now enjoined as obedience, or prohibited as disobedience. Virtues became duties; vices became sins. The latter were armed with terrors, the former arrayed in glories, with which no human power could invest them. Doctrines thus revealed, precepts thus enforced, left no alternative, but either absolutely to deny the authority that declared them, or to receive and abide by them as the dictates of infallible truth.

Let us next consider the *mode* in which these instructions were communicated by this extraordinary Teacher.

There is no doctrine, perhaps, or precept, promulgated in the Gospel, of which, when the grounds and reasons are actually set before us, we may not discern the expediency

and the fitness. But in his manner of declaring these truths, our Lord assumed a much higher tone than that of human reasoning. Meek and lowly as was his general deportment, persuasive also and affectionate as were his invitations to “come unto him,” yet no language so authoritative, or so expressive of conscious superiority, ever fell from the lips of a mere mortal instructor. Hear him applying to himself that prophecy in Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon
“ me, because he hath anointed me to preach
“ the Gospel to the poor; He hath sent me
“ to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of
“ sight to the blind, to set at liberty them
“ that are bruised, to preach the acceptable
“ year of the Lord.—And he began to say
“ unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears^h.” Hear him, again, proclaiming, “I am the light of the world: he
“ that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of lifeⁱ.” Again, “I am the Resurrection and the Life:
“ he that believeth in me, though he were
“ dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die^k.”

^h Luke iv. 18, 19, 21. ⁱ John viii. 12. ^k John xi. 25, 26.

Hear him also assert his pre-existent and eternal state. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, "Before Abraham was, I am^l;"—his inherent authority to instruct mankind, "I am the "way, and the truth, and the life, no man "cometh unto the Father, but by me^m;" his intimate knowledge of the Father, "As the "Father knoweth me, even so know I the "Father";"—his union with Him, "I and "my Father are one^o:"—his equal right to be believed and obeyed, "Ye believe in God, "believe also in Me^p." Well might His followers express their astonishment at these new and unheard-of claims; at such an elevated strain of language as none could have uttered without blasphemy, whose pretensions were not sanctioned as His were, by signs and wonders sufficiently attesting that God was with Him.

There were also other striking marks of superiority in our Lord's mode of teaching. He taught without fear of human power, without respect of persons, without any unworthy means of gaining favour with his hearers. Boldly he rebuked vice, impiety, and hypocrisy, in whomsoever they were found. Yet to all who were willing to receive the

^l John viii. 58.

^m John xiv. 6.

ⁿ John x. 15.

^o John x. 30.

^p John xiv. 1.

truth, his instructions were delivered with the most perfect condescension to their wants and infirmities, to the slowness of their apprehensions, and the strength of their prejudices. Many things spake he unto them in parables; in apt and striking similitudes, by which they might be brought to discern truths, or to receive admonitions, which otherwise they would have misapprehended or despised. Even his miracles were made the vehicle of moral and spiritual instruction. In restoring the paralytic, he demonstrated his power to forgive sins. In miraculously feeding the multitude, he declared himself to be the Bread of Life. In raising Lazarus from the dead, he preached the doctrine of a general resurrection. And in all his discourses, whether accompanied, or not, by miracles, there was a dignity, a simplicity, an energy of sentiment and expression, which adapted them equally to hearers of every description.

Moreover, our Lord gave frequent and demonstrative proofs, that he had an insight into the very hearts and thoughts of men; and many of his observations carried with them irresistible force, from being expressly directed to what was at the moment passing in their minds. Add to this, that his whole life

was a practical illustration of what he taught. No teacher ever vied with him in these respects. None, perhaps, ever ventured to assume such a character : certainly none ever attained to it.

3. Let us next consider the *effect* of his teaching.

Our Lord's personal ministry was confined to the Jewish nation ; it was incidentally only that it extended to the Gentiles. But to remove Jewish prejudices was a work as difficult as to extirpate heathen prepossessions. The Jews had been trained under an authority which they acknowledged to be Divine ; nor could they be expected to submit to the dictates of any instructor less than Divine. Accordingly our Lord confirmed his pretensions by reference to the Jewish scriptures, in order to prove the consistency of his doctrine with that of the Law and the Prophets ; yet as one divinely empowered to promulge that Law anew, and to give it a more extended operation. This was one distinctive character of his preaching, which excited both the admiration of his followers, and the resentment of his enemies. By both it was felt, that the wisdom with which he spake was not the wisdom of even the greatest human talents ; that the knowledge he imparted was

not acquired by human learning; that the spirit which animated his discourses was not that which belongs to mere human discernment. "The words which I speak unto you," said he, "they are spirit, and they are life^q." The feelings of his hearers corresponded with his declaration. They were convinced that he had a power, an energy, within him, to which no one else could make pretensions. They knew at the same time that he had not the ordinary means of acquiring such knowledge and such wisdom. "How," said they, "knoweth this man letters, having never "learned^r?" And this was most absurdly urged as a plea against him, instead of being regarded as the clearest and most decisive proof of his heavenly origin.

Thus, whether we regard the subjects of our Lord's discourses, his mode of instruction, or the effect produced by it, we may readily participate in the feelings of those who exclaimed, "Never man spake like this "man;" and this preeminence in his character will be rendered still more striking, if, for a moment, we contrast it with the pretensions of any other teachers, whether impostors or enthusiasts, whether Jewish scribes or heathen philosophers, nay, even with those of

^q John vi. 63.

^r John vii. 15.

the inspired Prophets and Apostles themselves.

Most truly may it be said, never Impostor or Enthusiast spake like Him.

Instances have been recorded of well intentioned persons, feigning a divine mission, for the purpose of improving the sentiments and the conduct of mankind. There have been legislators, who falsely pretended to this, that they might better enforce their maxims for the general good. There have been zealots, led by a heated imagination to believe themselves divinely inspired. But these pretensions have for the most part been made subservient to worldly purposes, or maintained by worldly power. No such means or purposes characterise our Lord's ministry. He spake to the hearts and consciences of men, disclaiming all external aid. He expressly forbade violence and compulsion. He aimed at no magisterial power. He interfered not with any such power, by whomsoever exercised; but enjoined submission, and himself submitted to it, as a religious duty. Would a deceiver have thus declined every offer of human assistance? Would an enthusiast have forborne to avail himself of the many opportunities afforded to him of kindling the zeal of the multitude, and carrying his point by

force? Would either of these have distinctly forewarned his followers of his own ignominious death, and called upon them to “take up the cross, and follow him^s ;” yet at the same time declare, that “the gates of hell should not prevail” against the purpose He had undertaken? Certainly, never did impostor or enthusiast speak to such purpose, or with such effect; submitting to the world’s scorn and contumely, yet overcoming every effort of the world to oppose the irresistible progress of his doctrine.

With equal truth may it be said, never Jewish scribe or Heathen philosopher spake like Him.

The teaching of the Jewish scribes consisted chiefly of frivolous comments on the Law of Moses, mixed with traditions of vague authority, corrupted by glosses of their own, and by palpable misinterpretations of the Law itself. They were more occupied in minute ritual observances, than in the weightier matters of the Law, judgment, justice, and righteousness. Nor could they produce authority higher than their own for these instructions. To quote the saying of some distinguished Rabbi, was sufficient to obtain for them credit and admiration. How differ-

^s Matth. xvi. 24.

^t Matth. xvi. 18.

ent was the character our Lord assumed ! He taught as a Lawgiver, not a mere Expositor of the Law. He raised the thoughts of his hearers above the letter of his precepts, and above its external observances, to display to them its spirit and its truth. He gave them enlarged and comprehensive views of it, adapted to the universality of that religion he came to establish. He swept away the spurious maxims pretended by the Pharisees to have been said “of old time,” and restored the moral Law to its genuine purity and lustre. By such an elucidation and such an enlargement of its meaning, he more clearly illustrated its main design, that of being introductory to the great dispensation of mercy and truth which through Him was to be fulfilled, and which had its origin even before the Law itself was promulgated.

No less different was our Lord’s teaching from that of Heathen sages. These, for the most part, delivered their doctrines in dark oracular sayings, or abstruse and recondite reasonings. Many seemed to take a pride in purposely concealing them from the multitude. But, with Him, the necessity of elaborate proof or subtle reasoning was entirely superseded. He spake as One who had both omnipotence and omniscience within himself !

“Believe me for the very work’s sake,” was sufficient to convince the most learned as well as the most illiterate, the philosopher as well as the peasant. Nevertheless, with this paramount claim to the reception of his doctrine, the simplicity and meekness of his bearing were no less extraordinary. The sublimest truths were delivered in the plainest and most familiar language, as the result of no mental labour, and needing no other confirmation than his own word could give them. “Father ! “I thank thee,” said he, “that Thou hast “hidden these things from the wise and “prudent, and revealed them unto babes^u.” They were hidden from such as were too wise in their own conceits to receive any thing that was not the fruit of their own discoveries ; but were made plain and easy to all who accepted them with the docility of children confiding in the infallibility of their instructor.

Lastly, never Prophet or Apostle spake like Him.

Prophets and Apostles have wrought miracles, have been gifted largely with inspiration, have produced ample testimonials that they were messengers of God. But the dif-

^u Matth. xi. 25.

ference betwixt the ambassador and the sovereign is precisely that which distinguished them from Him, who, though he came in appearance as a messenger, was Himself “Lord of all.” Observe the contrast between His language and theirs, in declaring the divine will. They spake “in the name of the Lord,” as mere instruments in his hands;—He, in His own name, as identified in power and authority with the Most High. “Verily, verily, “I say unto you,” was his most common form of speech. “I say unto you, That in “this place is one greater than the temple^x;”—“Behold, a greater than Jonas is “here;—Behold, a greater than Solomon “is here^y.” John the Baptist was “more “than a Prophet;” yet He that came after him was “mightier than he^z.” Moses was a Lawgiver, and faithful in God’s house “as a “servant;” but Christ came “as a Son over “his own house^a.” His whole deportment corresponded with this preeminence.

If such, then, were the distinguishing characteristics of our Lord as a divine teacher, the application of the subject is too obvious to escape notice. It admonishes the Chris-

^x Matth. xii. 6. ^y Matth. xii. 41, 42. ^z Matth. iii. 11.
^a Heb. iii. 5, 6.

tian *preacher*, with all humility and sincerity, ever to keep in view this great exemplar of perfection; to endeavour to imitate it, as far as human infirmity may permit; to supply, in some faint degree, the want of that perfect knowledge which He possessed, by diligently searching those Scriptures which contain the substance of what He revealed; to speak with authority, though with meekness; setting forth “the truth as it is in Jesus,” not as speaking of himself. The knowledge, the authority, the ability of the preacher of the Gospel, all must issue from the only infallible source of truth, “Jesus Christ, the “same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” For the same reasons, the Christian *hearer* also is no less bound to contemplate this divine pattern with a view to his own personal improvement. What the Evangelists have recorded of our Lord’s sayings was undoubtedly intended, not for them only to whom they were at first addressed, but to all who through them should come to the knowledge of the truth. They were recorded, that Christians of every age and country might perceive and acknowledge the divine power which He possessed, the infinite wisdom that guided His thoughts, the infallible truth which issued from His lips; and that, knowing this,

they might accept Him as “the Christ, the “Son of the living God.”

To all, then, we may address the Apostle’s awful admonition, “See that ye refuse not “Him that speaketh^b.” Refuse Him not as a teacher, compared with Whom all other teachers are as nothing worth. Refuse Him not, as “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” Refuse Him not, as a sacrifice for sin, and an ensample of godly Life; as a Mediator and Intercessor at the throne of grace; as Him who shall hereafter come to be our Judge; as combining every human excellence with every Divine perfection, the Son of Man and the Son of God. It was by uniting in His person these extraordinary characters, that “He spake as never man spake,” and verified, to the very letter of it, the Prophet’s sublime prediction, “His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the “everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace^c.” Fearful must be the consequences of disregarding such an Instructor. “For if they “escaped not who refused Him that spake “on earth”—as Moses and the Prophets—“much more shall not we escape, if we turn “away from Him that speaketh from hea-

^b Heb. xii. 25.

^c Isa. ix. 6.

“ ven ^d :” and “ if His wrath be kindled, (yea,
“ but a little,) blessed are all they that put
“ their trust in Him ^e .”

^d Heb. xii. 25.

^e Psalm ii. 12.

SERMON XIV.

1 PETER ii. 22.

Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.

IN the contemplation of our blessed Saviour's character, we are impressed with equal astonishment at the perfection of his intellectual and of his moral qualities. As the former bear the stamp of unerring truth and wisdom, so the latter evince the most spotless purity and rectitude. In both respects, he stands distinguished from every other individual of the human race, by a superiority which seems to admit not of competition. Yet in both, through his own gracious condescension to human infirmity, the character is so brought down to the level of our apprehensions, that while we admire it even as a model of unattainable excellence, we are impelled by the best feelings of our nature to study it as a pattern for our imitation.

So far as this applies to the consummate knowledge and the impressive energy which characterized our Lord as a Divine Teacher, and which compelled even his adversaries to exclaim, "Never man spake like this man;" the subject has already been considered in a former Discourse. But however exalted may be our conceptions of him in this respect, his claims to our faith and obedience derive an incalculable accession of strength from the no less convincing proofs of His unsullied holiness and virtue. Had these been in the slightest degree defective, our confidence in the truths He revealed would have been proportionally diminished. Had it been in the power of his enemies to lessen the value of his example by any one stain that could be fixed upon it; not only would his doctrine have been rendered questionable, but the declared purpose for which He came into the world had been frustrated and defeated.

To the consideration of this important part of his character our attention is drawn by St. Peter, in the words of the text; where he encourages Christians to suffer patiently the injuries they might be called upon to endure, "because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow His

“ steps : Who did no sin, neither was guile
“ found in His mouth.”

Similar declarations occur in the writings of St. Paul and St. John. The former, speaking of Christ, says to the Corinthians, “ He
“ hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew
“ no sin ; that we might be made the right-
“ eousness of God in Him ^a.” To the Hebrews the same Apostle observes, “ We have
“ not an High Priest which cannot be touched
“ with the feeling of our infirmities ; but was
“ in all points tempted like as we are, yet
“ without sin ^b :” and again, “ For such an
“ High Priest became us, who is holy, harm-
“ less, undefiled, separate from sinners ^c.” St. John says, “ Ye know that He was mani-
“ fested to take away our sins ; and in Him
“ is no sin ^d.”

In all these passages intimations are given of the connection that subsists between our Lord’s sinless character and the purposes of His divine mission. It is evidently implied, that we could not otherwise have been “ made
“ the righteousness of God in Him,” nor could he have been otherwise either our “ High
“ Priest” and Intercessor, or a Propitiation and Atonement, to “ take away our sins.”

^a 2 Cor. v. 21.

^b Heb. iv. 15.

^c Heb. vii. 26.

^d 1 John iii. 5.

In the present Discourse I shall endeavour to shew, first, how entirely these representations of our Lord's perfect innocence correspond with the history of him recorded by the Evangelists; and then suggest some considerations from the sacred writers, tending to illustrate the absolute necessity that the Redeemer of mankind should be thus "without sin."

On the first point it will be unnecessary to do more than select some of the most prominent features of his character for our contemplation.

Here, however, it is to be premised, that the consideration of our Lord's spotless innocence does by no means include the whole perfection of his moral character. It does not extend to the full display of the active, or even of the passive virtues, which his history sets before us. It refers not to the exercise of that diffusive benevolence which caused it to be said of him, that he "went about doing good^e;" nor to those numberless acts of piety which manifested in him the truest fervour of a devout disposition; nor yet to that extraordinary fortitude which led him to "endure the contradiction of sinners^f,"

^e Acts x. 38.

^f Heb. xii. 3.

and even their utmost rage and cruelty, without resistance or complaint. These, though parts of his character deserving of the highest admiration, are of a distinct class from those which seem to be intended in the simple declaration, that he “did no sin, neither was “guile found in his mouth.”

But we shall greatly err if we attach less importance to this negative kind of excellence recorded of him, than to those more conspicuous qualities which shed a greater brilliancy and lustre around him. For though the absence of such qualities would undoubtedly have made his example less exalted and less worthy of imitation, yet the want of innocence in any one point of principle or conduct would have been absolutely fatal to his pretensions. Innocence, indeed, in its genuine acceptation, implies that kind of excellence which is of all others the most difficult of attainment; that which never has been actually exemplified but in our Lord himself. Splendid virtues are far from being of rare occurrence; but of the man that offends not in thought or deed, we search in vain for examples. Heathen moralists seem to have been aware of this. They deemed no praise higher than that which is implied by the term *innocence*; and not unfrequently used that

term to denote greater excellence than could be characterized by any other expression.

The Apostle to the Hebrews places this part of our Lord's character in the strongest light, when he says, that he "was in all points "tempted like as we are, yet without sin^g." To endure temptation is the proper test of virtue; and if we apply this test, in the present instance, to the three different kinds of temptation which generally beset human nature; namely, those which proceed from worldly solicitations to evil, or from our sensual appetites and affections, or from our intellectual or spiritual faculties, the result will fully warrant the Apostle's declaration.

1. The *worldly* temptations to which our Lord was exposed were manifold. The very office he had to sustain as Messiah laid him open to these in no common degree. The notion the Jews entertained of a temporal conqueror and potentate in the person of the Messiah, and their impatience of the Roman yoke, disposed them to promote the views of any ambitious leader. The disciples of Jesus eagerly espoused these sentiments; and the multitude at large were prepared to acknowledge him for their King. The miraculous powers which he exercised might well be

^g Heb. iv. 15.

deemed sufficient to remove every impediment to the accomplishment of the most aspiring designs. His enemies also were aware of this, and industriously sought to ensnare him into conduct which might create suspicions of such sinister views. They accused him of intending to destroy the temple, and overthrow the Roman government; they charged him with “perverting the nation^b,” and endeavouring to usurp the regal power. The accusation expressly alleged against him before Pilate was that of “making himself a “kingⁱ,” and the inscription upon his cross denoted that this was the offence for which he suffered death.

The charge, however, was declared to be unfounded, even by the judge who delivered him over to punishment; and it is disproved in every page of his history. His whole conduct manifested an entire disregard of secular views; a disregard, not only of worldly honours and emoluments, but even of the ordinary enjoyments which ease and affluence afford. Every discourse he delivered to the multitude, every conversation he held with his disciples, tended to shew that his “kingdom was not of this world^k,” and to repress in his followers a worldly spirit. His bene-

^b Luke xxiii. 2.

ⁱ John xix. 12.

^k John xviii. 36.

dictions were pronounced upon dispositions the most opposite to such a spirit; his denunciations were uttered against those in whom it was most prevalent. None of his reproofs are more poignant than those with which he checked his disciples when they offended him in this respect. They who were most eager to press into his service were admonished to "take up the cross," and follow him; and were warned what they were to expect, if they resolved to become the disciples of a Master who "had not where to lay " his head."

In all, then, that related to worldly temptations, our Lord "did no sin, neither was " guile found in his mouth." Yet in any enterprise of this description, what could have obstructed HIM "who had all power in heaven and in earth¹;" whom "the winds and " the sea obeyed^m;" in whose service legions of angels were ready to come forth; who knew the thoughts and the hearts of men; at whose disposal were both the material and the spiritual world? Who besides himself, had ever such agents for effecting such designs? Yet who ever bore so patiently scorn and contumely; who less sought his

¹ Matt. xxviii. 18.

^m Matt. viii. 27.

own good, or coveted popular admiration? who more resolutely reprov'd those whom worldly interest would have led him to court and flatter, whether Jewish high-priest or Roman governor?

2. Respecting another class of temptations, those which are administered by the *sensual* appetites and affections, little need be said to prove that our Lord was also "without sin." Yet even on this head his accusers were not silent. They reviled him as "a man gluttonous" and a wine-bibber, the friend of publicans and sinnersⁿ. They laid snares for him in his public conversation, that they might discover, either in his lenity towards offenders of such a description, or in his interpretations of the Jewish Law, somewhat to depreciate his reputation among the people. But what was the result? Let his own dignified rebukes be confronted with these unworthy accusations. "Which of you convinceth me of sin^o?" "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance^p." "Verily, I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you^q." With these re-

ⁿ Matt. xi. 19.

^o John viii. 46.

^p Luke v. 31, 32.

^q Matt. xxi. 31.

proofs he silenced his adversaries, and we hear no more of such accusations. Strange, indeed, must have been that perverseness which could cast imputations so unworthy upon ONE whose doctrine and demeanour discountenanced every approach to impurity in word or thought, and surpassed even the rigour of the Jewish Law in restraining these evil propensities of our nature.

3. But a higher class of temptations is yet to be considered, such as assail the *intellectual* and *spiritual* faculties; and which too often are successful in overpowering minds of a superior cast, comparatively inaccessible to the seductions of sensuality or worldly grandeur.

Here again his adversaries vainly endeavoured to substantiate any charge against him. They accused him of arrogance in bearing witness of himself; of impiety in profaning the sabbath; of blasphemy in making himself equal with God. But mark his refutation of these charges. “If I do
“not the works of my Father, believe me
“not. But if I do, though ye believe not
“me, believe the works; that ye may know
“and believe that the Father is in me, and
“I in Him^r.” And again; “Though I bear
“record of myself, yet my record is true: for

^r John x. 37, 38.

“ I know whence I came and whither I go ;
 “ but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whi-
 “ ther I go^s ;” referring still to those works
 which bore testimony to his union with the
 Father, but which testimony his adversaries
 stubbornly rejected. By the same evidence
 he proved himself to be “ Lord also of the
 “ sabbath^t,” and that he was fully justified in
 requiring all men to “ honour the Son even
 “ as they honour the Father^u.” By similar
 reasoning he repelled the charge of his “ cast-
 “ ing out devils by the power of Beelzebub.”
 His authority over evil spirits was destructive
 of the power of the Evil One ; and “ if Satan
 “ cast out Satan, how shall his kingdom
 “ stand^x ?” No power, indeed, of any kind
 was exercised by him, but that which mani-
 fested the great purpose of his mission, glory
 to God and good-will towards men. We meet
 with no superfluous, no ostentatious display
 of it, to excite wonder or terror. He with-
 drew from the gaze of the multitude ; he re-
 fused the homage they were willing to pay
 him. He frequently enjoined the persons
 upon whom a miracle of mercy had been per-
 formed, to forbear from spreading abroad his
 fame. He veiled, as far as might be, the Di-

^s John viii. 14.

^t Mark ii. 28.

^u John v. 23.

^x Matt. xii. 26.

vinity that dwelt in him from human observation. None were oppressed by its splendour; none were deterred by it from approaching him, as one who could be “touched with a feeling of their infirmities.” Thus meek, lowly, condescending, and unobtrusive was his deportment, even in the mighty works he performed; fully corresponding with that remarkable prediction of him in the prophet Isaias, “He shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench^y.”

This wonderful humility in Him, “who, being in the form of God, and equal with God,” yet “took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men^z,” this stedfast resistance of every temptation presented to him of overpowering those around him, by the might of an intellect surpassing the wisdom of the wisest, and by the energy of a divine Spirit given unto him “without measure;” is indeed an inexhaustible subject of admiration, and never to be adequately conceived by human faculties. It is one of the highest and strongest proofs we could have “that he was without sin;” since no trials can be imagined more difficult to

^y Isa. xlii. 3.

^z Phil. ii. 6, 7.

encounter, than those which tempt to the exercise of the most exalted endowments. The disobedient angels, “who kept not their first “estate”,” fell through pride; through that aspiring and presumptuous spirit which a consciousness of the faculties belonging to their high estate had engendered. But our Lord, who, though he condescended to be made “lower than the angels,” was yet “the “brightness of God’s glory, and the express “image of his person,” never in one single instance departed from that obedience to the Father, which in his human character he was sent to perform. “Lo! I come,” said he, “to “do thy will, O God! I am content to do it; “yea, thy Law is within my heart*.”

Having thus briefly remarked upon the evidence of our Lord’s immaculate character and conduct, we may now advert to those considerations which the sacred writers have suggested, to shew how indispensably necessary it was that the Redeemer of mankind should be thus perfectly irreproachable; one “who did no sin, neither was guile found in “his mouth.”

This necessity is shewn to result from those great purposes of his mission, that he was to be an Atonement for sin, an Interces-

^u Jude 6.

^x Psalm xl. 7, 8.

sor for us with the Father, and an Example for our imitation.

1. The first of these purposes is thus stated by St. Paul; "He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him^y." If sin in general be irremissible without an atonement, the atonement itself cannot be available to its expiation unless it be free from sin. The very notion of a vicarious sacrifice implies that the victim offered has no guilt to answer for but that which it representatively bears. To suppose that the penalty of sin can be removed by an offering polluted or imperfect in its kind, is to forget that "God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity." The redemption of mankind depended, therefore, on the absolute purity of the Redeemer. "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" was to be "without blemish and without spot^z." It was by virtue of this immaculate character that Christ became "The Lord our Righteousness^a;" and that His infinite merits atoned for the sins of the whole world. Some meritorious cause of our justification was requisite; and in none could that be found, but in Him "who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth."

^y 2 Cor. v. 21.

^z 1 Pet. i. 19.

^a Jer. xxiii. 6.

2. In the next place, this was equally necessary, in order to render him an efficient Intercessor for us with the Father. On this point St. Paul copiously enlarges in his Epistle to the Hebrews. "Every high-priest," he observes, "taken from among men, ought, " as for the people, so also for himself, to offer " for sins." But "such an High-priest became " us who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate " from sinners, and made higher than the " heavens; who needeth not daily, as those " high-priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for " his own sins, and then for the people's: for " this he did once, when he offered up him- " self^b." This it is which assures us of the efficacy of his mediation. "If any man sin," says St. John, "we have an Advocate with the " Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous; and he " is the Propitiation for our sins^c." But if he himself had not been free from sin; if he had not been, in the fullest sense of the term, *righteous*, he would have needed some other advocate to have interceded for himself.

3. Lastly, there was also the same necessity for this, that he might become a perfect Example for our imitation. St. Peter introduces the character given of him in the text, by saying that he hath left us "an example, that

^b Hebr. vii. 26, 27.

^c 1 John ii. 2.

“we should follow his steps^d.” St. Paul exhorts, that “this mind should be in us, which “was in Christ Jesus^e.” St. John declares, “He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked^f :” and, “if we say that we have fellowship with “him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do “not the truth^g.” In these, and many other passages, the sacred writers propose our Lord as the only unexceptionable pattern of human conduct; nor do they ever presume to recommend themselves as ensamples to their followers, otherwise than as they faithfully endeavoured to walk in the path which He had trod before them.

But it may, perhaps, be said, that the very perfection of our Lord’s conduct seems to place it above our imitation. If he was “without sin,” was it not because he was absolutely impeccable? and if impeccable, was it not the mysterious union of the Godhead with the manhood which rendered it impossible that temptations should have any power over him? Are we, then, expected to perform what is impracticable, to imitate what is inimitable, to aim at what is confessedly beyond our reach?

^d 1 Pet. ii. 21.

^f 1 John ii. 6.

^e Phil. ii. 15.

^g 1 John i. 6.

It might be sufficient to answer, that the example is neither the less fit for imitation because it is perfect, nor would it be equally fit for imitation if it were less than perfect. We are commanded in the same scriptures to imitate the *divine* perfections; to “be perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect^h ;” to “be merciful, as HE is mercifulⁱ :” and we are thus commanded, because our duty, our happiness, our moral excellence, consists in endeavouring to approach as near as may be to that which is goodness itself. For the same reason the sinless character of our Lord, to whatever cause it be ascribed, or however unattainable by us in its full extent, is the model by which it behoves every one of his disciples to regulate their own conduct; neither is there any one point in it which may not afford us some practical lesson for our observance.

As to the question, whether our Lord was not only free from sin, but absolutely incapable of sinning, it may, perhaps, be better to avoid, than presumptuously to answer it. The divine nature we know to be impeccable. Whether the human nature became so by its union with the divine, is a mystery not revealed to us. The Apostle’s declaration, that

^h Matth. v. 48.

ⁱ Luke vi. 36.

our Lord “was in all points tempted like as “we are,” seems to indicate the possibility of sinning; since otherwise we can hardly conceive where there was room for temptations to operate. But this is matter of too high speculation; nor is it necessary to be determined. Thus far, however, we may confidently affirm; that our Lord was neither *conceived* nor *born* in sin; that as he was free from actual guilt, so was he free from that original corruption which, since the Fall, is inherent to all others of the human race. The angel, in announcing his miraculous conception to the Blessed Virgin, declared that the holy offspring should “therefore be called the “Son of God^k.” He is also called by St. Paul the second Adam, to distinguish him from the first, who had fallen from his integrity, and to denote that he was born as free from sin as Adam was when he first came from the hands of his Creator. The divine image, therefore, was as perfect in our Lord’s human nature as it was at first in Adam’s. He had not the evil concupiscence of sin, nor did he ever yield to temptation. Neither can it well be supposed that Adam had any originally inherent disposition to sin, although deceived to his ruin by the subtlety of the

^k Luke ii. 35.

tempter. The one, however, surrendered his original righteousness, and fell; the other retained it, and triumphed. Herein did our Lord manifest that exclusive perfection of character, to which no son of Adam, nor even Adam himself, has been found able to attain.

Nevertheless, it necessarily pertained to our Lord's human nature, that with it he should receive all its essential qualities; those qualities, which belong both to soul and body; intellect, will, affections, appetites, passions. His whole history abounds with proofs of this. He also partook largely of the sorrows, the mental and corporeal troubles, incidental to this mortal life. To be susceptible of these, was the consequence of his assuming our nature; and his actual endurance of them the Apostle speaks of as necessary to the purposes for which he assumed it. "Though he were a " Son," says he, "yet learned he obedience by " the things which he suffered: and being " made perfect, he became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him¹." And again; "It became him, for whom are all " things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings^m."

¹ Hebr. v. 8, 9.

^m Hebr. ii. 10.

Without going further, then, into this mysterious part of the subject, we may discern enough to convince us of the infinite wisdom and goodness which ordained that our deliverance from sin should be effected by such a Redeemer. Man in his fallen state could never have found a ransom for guilt; nor could he ever have seen exemplified in any one of his own species an entire and perfect model of that excellence for which he was created. We know that man was originally made in the image of God; but we see that image now universally defaced. We look in vain for unblemished innocence, for unerring rectitude, for that righteousness which can stand before an Omniscient Judge. How merciful, then, how condescending to human infirmity, is the dispensation which sets before us a living pattern of that perfection which was originally intended for man, and to which man might actually have attained, had he not by disobedience incurred the forfeiture of the high privileges at first bestowed upon him!

The full extent of this pattern of excellence remains yet to be considered. That part of his character, however, which rendered our Lord thus superior to every attempt that was made to turn him aside from the great purpose of his coming in the flesh,

is sufficient to shew that he was “mighty to “saveⁿ,” and that through him we may be “more than conquerors^o.” It is sufficient to assure us, that we need no other *atonement* than he hath made, no other *intercession* than he can offer, no other *pattern* of what is good and acceptable to our heavenly Father. The other parts of his character, his active piety and benevolence, his fortitude and forbearance, will afford matter for a future Discourse. But were we to stop short at this period of our inquiry, we could be at no loss for themes of admiration and of gratitude. The faithful Christian has enough to persuade him (as St. Paul was persuaded,) “that “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, “nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, “nor any other creature, shall be able to separate him from the love of God, which is “in Christ Jesus our Lord^p.”

ⁿ Isa. lxiii. 1.

^o Rom. viii. 37.

^p Rom. viii. 38, 39.

SERMON XV.

ACTS x. 38.

Who went about doing good.

IN this brief, but comprehensive statement, the Evangelist has given us a more lively representation of our blessed Saviour's character, than could have been done by the most elaborate description. He presents to us the portrait of one continually occupied in works of piety or beneficence; ever promoting by his active and unwearied exertions the improvement and happiness of mankind.

Upon the extraordinary powers manifested by our Lord as a teacher, and upon that pattern of blameless innocence which His history sets before us, I have already enlarged in two former Discourses; intended to prove that "never man spake like this man;" and that he "did no sin, neither was guile found "in his mouth." To render the character

complete, we have now to consider the no less conspicuous evidences of His unbounded goodness, by which He was daily accustomed to “let His light so shine before men, that “they might see His good works, and glorify “their Father which is in heaven^a.”

Had our Lord, though gifted with all spiritual knowledge and entirely free from sin, lived the life of a recluse; or shunned the society even of the worst of men and of his bitterest enemies; He would neither have fulfilled the purpose of His mission, nor have left an example universally beneficial. Though He had wrought miracles, though He had preached like John the Baptist in the wilderness, though He had even suffered as a martyr to the truth, and died as an atonement for the sins of the world; that lustre and that efficacy would still have been wanting, which the constant display of His active virtues afforded. It was by the continued exercise of these virtues, in the course of his holy and beneficent ministry, that the fullest assurance was given to His followers, not only of the truth of what He taught, but also of the practicability of the several duties He enjoined.

The world had never before seen a perfect

^a Matth. v. 16.

living pattern of holiness and virtue. They had never before seen a religious or moral teacher, who fully exemplified his own instructions. The Scribes and Pharisees, who “sat in Moses’ seat,” and taught the Law of Moses, were so far from exhibiting an adequate pattern of it in their conduct, that our Lord warned his disciples to “observe and do “whatsoever they bade them observe, but to “do not after their works; for they said, and “did not^b.” Respecting heathen philosophers, Cicero observes, “Where is any one “found among them whose morals, or whose “disposition and conduct are regulated by “sound reason? who regards his own system, “not as a mere display of knowledge, but as “a rule of life? who is consistent with him- “self, and governed by his own maxims^c?” Hence an ancient Christian Father remarks, that these heathen sages were “eloquent “against their own vices;” their doctrines being a reproach to their lives. From our Lord’s conduct may be gathered a system of

^b Matth. xxiii. 2, 3.

^c Quotus enim quisque philosophorum invenitur, qui sit ita moratus, ita animo ac vita constitutus, ut ratio postulat? qui disciplinam suam non ostentationem scientiæ, sed legem vitæ putet? qui obtemperet ipse sibi, et decretis suis pareat? *Cic. Tusc. Quæst.* l. ii. c. 4.

practical religion more than equivalent to a volume of instructions, as to every branch of duty, public or private, personal or social, which is capable of illustration by reference to his example.

The great leading principles which he himself represents as comprising the substance of all religion, are the love of God and the love of man. In the exercise of these, he was unceasingly occupied; and he has given a convincing proof how consistent they are with each other; or, rather, how inseparably they are connected, how mutually strengthened and perfected by their union and co-operation.

Our Lord's *piety* may well be classed among his active virtues; since it did not exhaust itself in mere devotional contemplation, or in abstraction of the mind from this world's concerns, but was manifested by outward and visible tokens of its influence. The love of God he lays down as "the first and "great commandment^c;" and he invariably comports himself according to that rule. He refers every thing to the glory of God. All his actions, all his discourses, tend to this. "I seek not, (says he,) mine own will, but the "will of the Father which hath sent me^d."

^c Matth. xxii. 38.

^d John v. 30.

“ My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work^e.” He assigns to those persons the first place in his affections who co-operate with him in this great purpose ;—“ Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother^f.” We discover nothing of this kind in heathen legislators or instructors. Either their own personal interest, or some feeling of vain-glory in being distinguished as the benefactors of mankind, may generally be discerned as the motive of their most laudable exertions. Christ alone continually manifested a mind intent upon God’s will, and devoted to His service. “ Father,” says he, at the awful hour when his ministry was about to close, “ I have glorified Thee on the earth ; I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do^g.” Neither did he, in the furtherance of that work, neglect any of the ordinary duties of religion. It was his maxim, in these, as in other respects, to “ fulfil all righteousness^h.” Though he needed no regeneration, he submitted to the rite of baptism. Though he was “ Lord of the sabbath,” he sanctified it by his own observance. Though he taught

^e John iv. 34.

^f Matth. xii. 50.

^g John xvii. 4.

^h Matth. iii. 15.

men to worship God “in spirit and in truthⁱ,” he did not depreciate external ordinances. We find him constant in his attendance on public worship; not only at the temple-service, ordained by the Mosaic Law, but at that of the synagogue; a service of later institution and of inferior authority. Those festivals of the Jewish church which had been super-added to the great feasts appointed by Moses were sanctioned by his presence. His reverence for places of public worship was further signalized by a remarkable exertion of miraculous power in driving out from the temple those who had profaned the house of God.

Yet notwithstanding this attention to every external act of piety, and the genuine fervour which appears to have accompanied his performance of such duties, no indication can be discovered of the weakness of superstition, or of any undue stress laid upon the mere formalities of religious service. The part which our Lord had to perform in this respect was one of singular difficulty. Not only was the Jewish ceremonial Law itself a very burthensome service, and a service, moreover, which, by his own fulfilment of its purpose, was shortly to be superseded and annulled; but

ⁱ John iv. 23.

it was overloaded, at the time of his appearance, with additional observances, and encumbered with needless perplexities, by those who had “taught for doctrines the commandments “of men^k.” To separate these, when necessity required it, from duties of higher obligation, was both an ungracious and a hazardous task. But it consisted not with the real sanctity of our Lord’s character, that “the “weightier matters of the Law, judgment, “justice, and righteousness^l,” or the works of mercy and benevolence more especially characteristic of his divine mission, should be made to yield to the less necessary, however blameless usages, which had been arbitrarily engrafted upon the Law itself. Hence the frequent cavils he had to encounter, and the obloquy he suffered in performing deeds of mercy on the sabbath-day; in vindicating his authority so to do, even by the exercise of miraculous power; in contending with the deep-rooted prejudices of the priests and the people, respecting the intrinsic worth of ordinances in which they deemed the whole of religion to consist; and in teaching them by his own practice the true meaning of that divine maxim which they so little understood, “I will have mercy, and not sacri-

^k Matth. xx. 9.

^l Matth. xxiii. 23.

“fice^m.” In effecting this arduous purpose, occasion is continually presented to us in his history, of admiring that extraordinary discretion, firmness, conciliation, and forbearance, by which he manifested his zeal for God’s glory, and his reverence for every sacred institution, while he discountenanced that spurious or pretended sanctity, which would confound things circumstantial or indifferent with things essential to religion, and render piety itself subversive of the highest moral obligations.

If further demonstrations of our Lord’s piety were requisite, the Evangelists have supplied them in the various instances they record of his private as well as public devotions. Though continually occupied among crowds of followers, and ever intent upon extending to the wretched and helpless, to the ignorant and depraved, the blessings of health and strength, of instruction and reformation ; large portions of his time appear to have been set apart for secret meditation and prayer, for spiritual communion with his heavenly Father, and for strengthening Himself by these means in the further progress of his ministry. Here, again, we see the perfection of that humility so conspicuous in all his

conduct. He who had no sins of his own to be forgiven, he who knew that the Father heard him always, he who on every occasion gave such abundant demonstration of the spirit and the power abiding in him for the high purpose he had undertaken; yet deemed it incumbent upon him in his human nature, "in every thing by prayer and "supplication to make known his requests "unto God". And not only was this done at stated times and seasons, or at intervals of privacy and retirement, but, when occasion called for it, in the presence of others; when, for the sake of example to those around him, or to give them assurance that God was with him, he either invoked the Divine blessing upon an act to be performed, or gave glory to God for its success.

But our admiration of this feature in the portrait must not draw off our attention from one equally striking, and equally deserving of our contemplation; that love of man, that pure and unbounded *benevolence*, which, blending itself with this unsophisticated piety, rendered him a still brighter model of excellence, a still worthier object of imitation.

With reference more especially to this

ⁿ Phil. iv. 6.

part of his character, it is said of him in the text, that he “went about doing good ;” the expression being applied, as the context shews, to the beneficence displayed in the variety of miracles which he wrought. Of these it has often been remarked, that scarcely any can be pointed out, which do not strikingly indicate the benevolence of his disposition, and his tender feeling for the sufferings and infirmities of mankind. Even in the most stupendous manifestations of his power, in creating food for the supply of multitudes, in stilling the tempestuous waves, in compelling death and the grave to yield up their victims, the occasion that called forth each miracle was not the pride of impressing a wondering crowd with amazement, but some substantial act of relief, of deliverance, of consolation, where human means were ineffectual. With very few exceptions, and those easily explained on other grounds, we shall find this to be the character of all his miracles. Men’s faith were confirmed by them, as they might have been by wonders of severity and terror : but their affections also were gained, and their dispositions softened and subdued, by the benignity which thus tempered the awful Majesty of heaven.

Our Lord evinced also his never-failing love towards mankind, on many occasions where no miraculous display of his power was called forth. The greater part of his ministry was occupied among mixed assemblages of friends and enemies, admirers and scoffers, poor and rich, ignorant and learned. To all, his condescension and good-will were in some way manifested; counsel and encouragement were given to his faithful followers; warning and remonstrance to the faithless and impenitent; salutary cautions to the great and opulent; topics of consolation to the indigent and necessitous; plain and elementary instruction to the ignorant and humble-minded; considerations of a higher cast to those who were better able to bear them. But most of all do we find his kindness extended towards penitent and contrite offenders. Many affecting incidents occur in which he exercised this highest species of benevolence. He did not, however, shun communication with those who were inveterately prejudiced against him; but occasionally partook of their society, as if desirous to conciliate their good-will. Nor did he adopt the prevailing hostility betwixt Jew and Samaritan; but took every opportunity of endeavouring to diminish its force, and to im-

press upon each the duty of regarding the other as a neighbour. His kindness towards young children is another indication of his benevolent disposition. So are his soothing and compassionate addresses to the sick, to the mourners, to the afflicted of every description. He “wept with those that wept.” He wept also for those whose stubborn and incorrigible tempers could not be softened either by his admonitions or persuasions. The warmth of his personal friendship for the Apostles is discovered throughout the whole of his affecting discourse with them on the eve of his sufferings. His filial piety, and his fraternal affection for “the disciple whom “he loved,” are more feelingly shewn by the brief emphatical sentences uttered to each, during his agonies on the cross, than by all the colouring that descriptive eloquence could give. His meekness in bearing injuries, and his forgiving disposition towards those who inflicted them upon him, were conspicuous on the same trying occasion. They were no less so throughout the whole course of his ministry; nor was the warmth of his resentment ever kindled against his adversaries, except when their enmity tended to pervert others, or to arraign that Divine authority by which he acted. Their blasphemy against

Him personally as the Son of man he could forgive. But their blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; their attributing to the power of the evil one those mighty works which shewed the energy of the Holy Spirit within him; was an offence precluding in the very nature of it the hope of that repentance and conviction which might lead them to retrace their error; and therefore called forth his heaviest denunciations.

It were endless to pursue the subject of our Lord's benevolence, in all its ramifications. Some general conception of its unbounded extent may be formed by applying to it St. Paul's description of Christian charity. "It suffereth long, and is kind; envieth not; vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not its own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things^o." Who would not suppose that the Apostle was here delineating the very portrait of his blessed Master? But, without descending even to these particulars, the one great design of our Lord's coming into the world, the very purpose for which

^o 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5, 6.

he lived and died, is a more stupendous proof of benevolence than all that history can parallel or human imagination can frame. To save a lost world, to reconcile sinners to an offended God, to shew them the way to eternal life, and to enable them to attain it; these were effusions of loving-kindness which could only issue from the fountain of goodness itself; and whatever indications of that disposition we discern in the several occurrences of his life are but so many subordinate parts of the main design.

Connected with this inexhaustible mercy and benevolence, another prominent feature in our Lord's character remains yet to be noticed—that exemplary *fortitude* which enabled him to bear a weight of calamity peculiar to himself.

If this quality in our blessed Saviour had borne any resemblance to the apathy of the Stoic, the sternness of the hero, or the blind self-devotion of the enthusiast, it were unworthy of special commendation. But it partook of none of these suspicious qualities; nor do we find any thing strictly parallel with it in the annals of philosophy, heroism, or martyrdom. With an acute sense of pain and ignominy, there was manifested a calm and deliberate contemplation of the

sufferings to be endured, and of the Divine purpose to be effected by them. In the awful scene which took place in the garden of Gethsemane, there appears also to have been suffering of a peculiar and mysterious kind, something above our feeble conceptions—a mental conflict, an agony of soul, greater than we can suppose the mere anticipation of his bodily sufferings to have called forth. Christian martyrs have trod in the steps of their crucified Lord, and have “resisted unto blood,” not only with patience, but with joy and triumph. But Christian martyrs have never borne the burthen of *expiating sin*. The expiation already made for them was their stay and support. They have never “poured out their souls an offering for sin^p ;” nor is it possible they should have a feeling, or form even a conception of that mental effort which such an offering might require. This, probably—(I say probably, because it is a mystery we can never entirely develope)—this, probably, constituted the bitterest ingredient in that cup which our Lord voluntarily drank. His fortitude, therefore, as well as all his other high and excellent qualities, stands above comparison with any that the rest of mankind can produce. It is con-

nected with that inexhaustible benevolence which embraces the whole human race, and with that intenseness of zeal for the Divine glory which would endure every thing, rather than that sin and death should get the victory. These were the incitements to that constancy, that submission, that meekness, that willing obedience under every trial, which from his first temptation in the wilderness, to his last hour upon the cross, rendered the pattern he hath set before us “perfect and “entire, wanting nothing^q.”

^q In treating of this mysterious subject I have wished to avoid, rather than attempt to remove, some of the difficulties which surround it. To speak of our Lord as oppressed by a sense of the actual guilt of the whole world then laid upon him, or by the absolute dereliction of the Divine aid then supposed to be withdrawn from him, appears to me hardly warranted by any direct authority of Scripture, or by any just inferences from it, notwithstanding some opinions of this kind entertained by expositors of unquestionable reputation. To me it appears sufficient to suppose, with reference to our Lord's human nature, that his mental perturbation, his intense solicitude in this unparalleled conflict, was heightened beyond all conception by the magnitude, not merely of the sufferings to be endured, but of the tremendous issue that was dependent upon them. Without calling in preternatural considerations to account for this agony or mental struggle, we may conceive that when our Lord presented to his mind the consequences that must result, either, on the one hand, from his enduring these sufferings in conformity to the Divine will, or, on the other, from his swerving, even in the slightest degree, from a free and

Let us now close the inquiry which has been pursued in this and the two preceding discourses, on our Lord's character as a teacher and a pattern of innocence and good works, with a few general reflections.

The testimony hence derived to the truth of Christianity is decisive and unanswerable. It bids defiance to any adversary who acknowledges the truth of the history itself. We challenge the unbeliever to bring forward a religion of any kind standing upon the authority of such a Founder as this. History will be searched in vain for a record of any teacher of a false religion uniting in his character such qualities as distinguished the willing submission to them ; when the result would in effect be either to accomplish the salvation of mankind, or to frustrate its accomplishment ;—more acute perception of the accumulated weight, the aggravated burthen of responsibility laid upon him, than we can possibly imagine, might at the instant have pressed upon him, so as almost to overwhelm every faculty of soul or body. In this supposition there is surely enough to account for what is recorded—enough to shew that, inasmuch as our Lord was “in all things tempted like as we are,” and partook of all the feelings incidental to our nature, he could not in this instance but be conscious that he was placed in a situation in which no other human being ever was or could be placed, and under circumstances so awfully, so tremendously important in their issue, that no fortitude, no magnanimity, no concentration of human strength and resolution, would enable him to contemplate it without an intensity of feeling surpassing any thing that the rest of mankind had ever undergone.

meek and lowly Jesus. Where is the impostor to be found who could assume even the semblance of such qualities? They who trust to feigned virtues would ill bear such trials as those which our Lord endured, or such scrutiny as his character underwent from opponents the most acute and inquisitive. Yet which of them “convinced him of sin^r?” And what was he to gain, if a deceiver? Poverty, shame, and death.

Will you say, then, that he feigned this for a good purpose? It is a solecism in terms. There is no goodness in falsehood; no piety in deceit; no virtue in any thing that maketh a lie. The founder of such a religion would stand convicted out of his own mouth, could one tittle of his doctrine be proved untrue. His pleas of good intention would be instantly annihilated by the maxim of his own Apostle, against “doing evil, that good may “come^s.” No;—sooner may light have concord with darkness, than Christ with Belial.

Will you confound his character, then, with those of enthusiasts who “know not what “they say, or whereof they affirm?” Will you liken him to men of heated imaginations, wrought up to strong persuasions founded on no evidence of truth? We shall have viewed

^r John viii. 46.

^s Rom. iii. 8.

our subject to little purpose, if such a notion can be for a moment entertained; if He who “spake as never man spake,” who “did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth,” and “who went about doing good;”—He, on whom the tongue of slander could fix no one stain of imperfection,—should nevertheless be classed among the tribe of visionaries who have left behind them nothing but monuments of their own folly and imbecility.

Consider, again, how all these distinguishing characteristics of our Saviour corresponded with what the Prophets had foretold of him. “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest
“upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might,
“the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord^t.” “Then the eyes of the blind
“shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf
“shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame
“man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the
“dumb shall sing^v.” “Unto you that fear my
“name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise
“with healing in his wings^w.” “He shall
“feed his flock like a shepherd^x.” “He had
“done no violence, neither was any deceit in
“his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to

^t Isa. xi. 2.

^w Malachi iv. 2.

^v Isa. xxxv. 5.

^x Isa. xl. 11.

“bruise him; he hath put him to grief. He
“is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and
“as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so
“he openeth not his mouth. For the trans-
“gression of my people was he stricken. And
“he was numbered with the transgressors;
“and he bare the sin of many, and made in-
“tercession for the transgressors^y.” Have
these things been fulfilled, or have they not?
to whom do they apply, but to CHRIST him-
self? And do they not apply to HIM, as if
the historian rather than the prophet had
described them?

If, then, we admit these facts, there is but
this alternative; you must accept the faith
that is grounded upon them, or you must be-
lieve that the Person in whom these things
were verified;—ONE, who, though obscure in
birth and station, had more knowledge, and
taught more excellent notions of God and of
moral duty, than all who ever went before
him;—ONE whose doctrine tended to the ut-
most perfection of piety and virtue;—ONE
who preached and discoursed on the pro-
foundest subjects with perfect clearness and
consistency, and who in every instance con-
ducted himself as a pattern of holiness, jus-
tice, temperance, humility, sincerity;—was ne-

vertheless a hypocrite or a self-deceiver; incurring all manner of obloquy and suffering, for the sake of propagating that as true which he knew to have no foundation but in his own invention. On which side of the alternative the imputation of *credulity* will lie, it requires but little consideration to determine. Leaving, then, the unbeliever to his own perverse imaginations, it remains only for us, who admit the truth and its consequences, to consider how we stand affected by them.

Our Lord's perfection of character was not meant only to strengthen our faith, but to influence our practice. He "left us an example, that we should follow his steps^z." Some of his perfections, indeed, we cannot imitate; and some extraordinary actions, arising out of the peculiar nature of his divine mission, can no otherwise be made applicable to ourselves, than as they indicate certain qualities or dispositions which it behoves us to cultivate for our own spiritual improvement. In this respect, no part of his conduct is without its practical use. Even in the highest functions of his office, as well as in his ordinary intercourse with men, may be discerned piety, charity, purity, meekness,

^z 1 Pet. ii. 21.

condescension, compassion, constancy, prudence, or some other virtues, in which every faithful follower of him will endeavour to excel. Some circumstances there were, however, in his conduct, arising out of special occasions, in which we, perhaps, can never be placed, or intended for special purposes which we can hardly be supposed to contemplate. It is not, for example, required of us, that we should “eat with publicans and sinners,” or perform menial offices to our inferiors in station, from a vain affectation of imitating that conduct in Him which was grounded on motives and reasons for the most part inapplicable to ourselves; nor would it become us, under any persuasion of zeal in the cause of religion, to assume that authority which He exercised in purifying the Jewish temple. Yet are we bound, with reference even to these extraordinary actions, to imitate and exemplify, as far as our means and stations may permit, that spirit of zeal, of humility, and of concern for the spiritual welfare of others, which these actions so clearly indicated. On the other hand, it is no less evident, that we ourselves may be placed in circumstances, respecting which we find nothing strictly parallel in our Lord’s history; and to which, therefore, we cannot, without some degree of

presumption, venture to apply His example. But neither in these, nor in any other cases, are we in danger of being misled by that example, if we be content to regard it only as a general pattern of Christian character, and endeavour in sincerity and truth to adapt it to our own circumstances, and to frame our behaviour accordingly. Thus shall we act up to the full spirit of the Apostle's rule, "He that saith he abideth in HIM, ought himself also so to walk even as he walked."

To this end, then, let all our meditations on the subject of our Lord's character and conduct be directed. Let every one "that hath ears to hear," hear and reverence the wisdom of him that "spake as never man spake." "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity^a." Let every one that cherisheth the hope of the Gospel "purify himself even as HE is pure^b." Let every one who professeth to "love him keep his commandments^c," and remember his declaration, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples^d." Finally, let every one who thus endeavours to "adorn the doctrine of God his Saviour in all things," look with

^a 2 Tim. ii. 19.

^b 1 John iii. 3.

^c John xiv. 15.

^d John xv. 8.

humble hope and confidence to a joyful recompense for his labours, knowing that he who thus “reapeth receiveth wages, and ga-
“ thereth fruit unto life eternal ^c.”

^c John iv. 36.

SERMON XVI.

JER. xxiii. 6.

This is the name whereby He shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness.

THAT the Jewish Prophets were occasionally favoured with very clear and distinct communications from God's Holy Spirit, respecting the personal character and office of the Messiah, is evident from this and many other passages of the Old Testament. They foretold, not only the time, and place, and other circumstantial particulars of his coming, but also his Divinity, his Incarnation, his authority as a Lawgiver and King, his Priesthood, his suffering as an Atonement for sin, and every thing which marked him to be the Redeemer of mankind. So numerous are the testimonies of this description, as to excite our astonishment that the very people to whom the sacred oracles were committed

should not only overlook their most obvious signification, but even persecute and destroy the very Person in whom, and in whom alone, all these marvellous predictions were so signally accomplished.

Among the most prominent of these stands Jeremiah's declaration in the text; a message well adapted to awaken the loftiest expectations in those to whom it was immediately addressed; nor less so, to confirm the faith of Christian believers who, in these latter times, are still better able to appreciate its entire import and signification.

The Prophet having foretold in the preceding chapter severe judgments upon the Jewish nation and their rulers, proceeds to comfort them with an assurance of the coming of that promised seed, whom, from the earliest ages, their forefathers had been taught to look to as their great Deliverer. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch; and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely^a." Here are specified certain appropriate distinctions of the Messiah not easily to be misconceived;

^a Jer. xxiii. 5, 6.

his descent from David, his regal and judicial authority, and the participation of both Judah and Israel in the blessings of his kingdom ; when these two kingdoms should no longer be separated from each other, but acknowledge the same sovereign Ruler. But lest it should be imagined that in this illustrious Person they were to recognise a *temporal* deliverer, an *earthly* monarch, a mere *human* legislator or sovereign, the Prophet adds, “And this is the name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness ;” a name expressive of qualities which never could belong to any of the sinful race of man ; but which necessarily required that all the preceding characteristics of this extraordinary Person should be interpreted in a sense not incompatible with this transcendent title. From this title, indeed, nothing less could reasonably be inferred than his essential divinity ; the original word, *Jehovah*, here rendered *Lord*, being that which the sacred writers never apply to any created being, even of the highest order, but restrict it to the true and only God. When, therefore, the Prophet designates by this peculiar title the same Person of whom it was said in the preceding verse that he should be of the seed of David, and consequently appear “in fashion

“as a man,” the passage can only be rendered consistent with itself by supposing that in him the human nature was to be united with the divine; and that by virtue of this mysterious union he was to become “the Lord our Righteousness,” the Saviour of mankind, the Person through whom mankind should be accepted as righteous in the sight of God.

With reference, perhaps, to this remarkable expression, St. Paul speaks of Christ as being “made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption^b ;” and St. John styles him “Jesus Christ the Righteous^c.” Isaiah also prophesied, that his name should be called “EMMANUEL, or, God with us^d ;” which prophecy St. Matthew identifies with the angel’s prophetic message to Joseph, “Thou shalt call his name JESUS, for “he shall save his people from their sins^e.” The identity (if we may so say) of the two appellations, appears to consist in the meaning of the name *Jesus*, which denotes a *Saviour*, and which was given him because he should “save his people from their sins.” They were his people, not in his human character, or by any earthly authority he had over them; but by virtue of his divine cha-

^b 1 Cor. i. 30.

^c 1 John ii. 1.

^d Isa. vii. 24.

^e Matt. i. 21.

racter, inasmuch as he was Jehovah, Emmanuel, their Creator as well as their Redeemer. In this sense alone he was, as the same Prophet had declared of him, "mighty to save:" and hence we may presume the Evangelist regarded the name *Jesus* to be in force and meaning equivalent to that of *Emmanuel*. Jeremiah's prophecy still more distinctly marks this connection between them; since it unites in one and the same expression both the divinity of our Lord, and his atonement for sin, and the inseparability of these from each other. He was the Lord Jehovah, or "God with us;" and he became "our Righteousness," as his name *Jesus* denoted, to "save us from our sins." In this twofold character we acknowledge him as the Redeemer of mankind.

Thus briefly, yet not obscurely, does the Prophet in these words present to us a subject of the deepest interest that can occupy the mind of man; a subject, indeed, which it passes our finite understandings fully to comprehend; but of which, however inadequate our conceptions of it, we may yet discern enough to awaken our gratitude and love towards its divine Author, and to teach us to what end it should be applied.

The first step towards a right apprehension

of the great work of our redemption, is to consider the occasion that gave rise to this manifestation of the Divine wisdom and goodness. In consequence of the Fall of Adam, man became so prone to evil in the very constitution of his nature, that notwithstanding the checks and warnings he continually receives from the inward law of his mind approving what is right and good, and also from the suggestions of the Holy Spirit inciting and invigorating those sentiments within him, he is still so frequently, if not habitually, drawn into violations or omissions of his known duty, as to render him guilty before God and liable to condemnation ; so that were God to “enter into judgment” with the whole human race, there should “no man living be “justified in his sight’.” Original sin, that corruption now innate within us, hath ever led, and will ever lead, more or less, to actual sin ; precluding every possible claim even in the very best of men to the Divine acceptance, on the ground of pure unblemished righteousness ; affording no reasonable assurance even of pardon and remission, by any attempt that we can make to liberate ourselves from the judicial consequences of conscious guilt. From these, indeed, it is mani-

† Psalm cxliii. 2.

fest, (even upon the most superficial view of the subject,) that none but God himself can be competent to effect our deliverance. "Against THEE only," saith the Psalmist, "have I sinned, and done this evil in THY sight^g." Every offence committed against God or man is a breach of the *divine law*. In this consists the real *gravamen* of the offence, whatever it may be. This it is which constitutes it a *sin*, in the proper acceptation of the term. Consequently, to remit it, or to prescribe any conditions on which it shall be remitted, can be the prerogative of God only. And since it is an essential attribute of that Being, that "he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity^h," nothing can be more consonant with our own notions of rectitude, than what the Scriptures every where set forth, that without other means than *we* can devise of vindicating the offended laws of God, and purifying the offenders from the guilt that lies upon them, "all" must necessarily "come short of the glory of Godⁱ;" and that, in strictness and truth, "there is none" that can be accounted righteous, "no not one^k." The more we revolve the subject in our thoughts, the more shall we be perplexed in our endea-

^g Psalm li 4.

^h Hab. i. 3.

ⁱ Rom. iii. 23.

^k Rom. iii. 12.

vours to imagine any possible means by which this state of moral debasement and despondency can be effectually removed.

With respect, indeed, to any satisfaction that could be accepted by the Almighty, without derogating from his holiness, his purity, or his justice, it becomes us, under every circumstance, to speak and think with the utmost humility and with reverential awe. By the light of nature we know of no satisfaction that can possibly be made. We know of nothing that can justify a sinner in the sight of God; nothing that can assure him of an acquittal from guilt, or of restoration to the Divine favour. As we readily perceive it to be “not possible that the blood of bulls and “goats should take away sin¹,” so we are no less impelled to acknowledge that the blood of an human victim, or the sacrifice even of an angelical being of the highest order, could never make compensation for disobedience to the Divine Law. Under this impression, and judging only from such imperfect abstract notions as we can form on so fearful a subject, we should be apt at once to throw ourselves implicitly upon the Divine forbearance, conscious that none but God himself could provide the means of so attempering justice

¹ Heb. x. 4.

with mercy, as to extend the one without disparagement of the other. And if this be the case in any instance of individual guilt, how much more so when the question is asked, What can be “a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world?” To this question no answer could ever have been given, none even plausibly conjectured, by human thought. The most rational presumption would be, that in whatever it might consist, it must be something divine in its nature and origin, divine in its operation and effect; since nothing short of absolute holiness and goodness could be deemed worthy of HIM, whose perfections the most exalted of his creatures may not presume to emulate.

It is well, then, that we are not left to the harassing and perilous disquisitions of human reason, on a concern above all others the most intensely interesting to every soul of man. Still more is it a source of unspeakable consolation and encouragement, that the wonderful scheme of our redemption unfolded in the sacred writings, however it may surpass our finite comprehensions, is nevertheless in entire accordance with the most anxious anticipations we could form of what is requisite to assure us of its all-sufficiency in every re-

spect. Most perfectly does it correspond with those feelings of utter inability on our part, and of the necessity of an interposition nothing less than divine, which so fully takes possession of our minds in contemplating our situation as fallen and sinful beings. How forcible is the language of Scripture, whether of Prophets or of Apostles, in presenting this subject to our view! “I looked,” says the Almighty, by his prophet Isaiah, “I looked, “and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold; therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me, and my fury it upheld me^m.” Again; “I beheld, and there was no man even “amongst them, and there was no counsellor, “that when I asked of them could answer a “wordⁿ.” And again; “He saw that there “was no man, and wondered that there was “no intercessor; therefore His arm brought “salvation unto him, and his righteousness, “it sustained him^o.” To the same effect St. Paul says, “GOD was in CHRIST, reconciling “the world unto himself, not imputing their “trespasses unto them^p.” No point appears to be more strongly, more invariably, insisted upon by the sacred writers, than this, that the efficacy of the Atonement was derived

^m Isa. lxiii. 5. ⁿ Isa. xli. 28. ^o Isa. lix. 16. ^p 2 Cor. v. 19.

from the immediate act of the Godhead ; from one Person of the ever-blessed Trinity having taken our nature upon him, and in that nature offered up a sacrifice holy and unblemished ; a victim equivalent in value to whatever might be the ransom required.

Against this mysterious dispensation, and especially against the doctrine involved in it of *vicarious atonement*, the objections usually advanced appear for the most part to originate in a disbelief or disregard of that other great article of our faith, no less involved in it, the *Divinity* of the Redeemer. His Divinity is that which gives a stamp of infinite value to the sacrifice upon the cross ; that which most effectually removes every doubt of its sufficiency and perfection. It is that also, which most readily obviates every objection respecting the supposed injustice of ordaining the innocent to suffer for the guilty. With those who regard our Saviour as nothing more than man, however guiltless and perfect, this difficulty may well seem insurmountable. But take the case as it is actually presented to us, and the main objections vanish. For as, on the one hand, the acknowledged perfections of the Divine nature united to the manhood, supersede all question concerning the *efficacy* of the sacrifice offered in

the manhood only; so, on the other hand, the voluntary interposition of a Divine person in our behalf removes every shadow of a charge injurious to its *justice*. The Almighty here calls not upon any of His creatures to make the sacrifice. He takes the whole work of redemption upon HIMSELF. He “provides for Himself the Lamb for an offering⁹.” And though “the just suffers for the unjust^r,” and “He “who knew no sin is made sin for us^s,” yet the sacrifice being thus prepared and perfected by God himself, and not exacted from any created being, “every mouth is stopped;” none is aggrieved, none has cause to arraign the equity of the dispensation. Stupendous as the work indeed is, and exhibiting a display of mercy and condescension surpassing all that it could enter into the heart of man to conceive; yet does it stand clear of every imputation on the wisdom or justice of its Divine Author; absorbing every other feeling of the mind in emotions of love and gratitude, of overpowering admiration and reverential awe.

Abstaining then from all unprofitable speculations on a mystery so unfathomable, let our thoughts be chiefly employed in applying it as the main foundation and support of Christian faith and practice.

⁹ Gen. xxii. 8.

^r 1 Pet. iii. 18.

^s 2 Cor. v. 21.

From the foregoing representation of the dignity and office of our Redeemer, foretold by the Prophets and confirmed by the Apostles, we are taught to “look unto Jesus,” both as “the Author and Finisher of our faith.” Man could not be the author of his own salvation. It cometh of God only; and CHRIST who is expressly declared to be “the Author of eternal salvation^t,” is no less explicitly represented to us as God himself. In his *divine* character therefore this title is ascribed to him. As the Finisher of our faith, the person in whom all things relating to our redemption were accomplished, he was indeed the *man* Christ Jesus, who “died for our sins, and rose again for our justification^u.” This was the effect of his incarnation. If then we deny that in him dwelt “the fulness of the Godhead bodily,” we undermine the foundation of our trust in him as a Saviour; and must be at a loss to conceive that the shedding of his blood could have that efficacy in it, which, according to the Scriptures, as well as to our own imperfect apprehensions, the exigency of the case appears to require. They, therefore, who deny him in the one character, go far towards denying him in the other. If we doubt his

^t Heb. v. 9.

^u Rom. iv. 25.

divinity, our belief in the atonement is shaken. If the atonement be acknowledged, the belief of his divinity becomes requisite to give it full effect. Accordingly, they who question the former doctrine are generally disposed to question the latter; whilst the Church Catholic throughout all ages has uniformly upholden both; acknowledging our Lord to be “the everlasting Son of the Father,” yet that it is he who hath “redeemed us with his precious blood.” Upon the certainty of both these doctrines depends the whole system of our redemption; which is weakened, if not destroyed, where either of them is disclaimed. If, indeed, our Lord had not a divine character, or if he did not suffer as an atonement for our offences, in what sense do we receive him, and trust in him as a Saviour? To instruct men by precept and example in a more perfect way of righteousness; to “bring life and immortality to light” by a more distinct revelation of a future state; and to declare more explicitly than heretofore on what terms the Almighty would bestow the gift of eternal life;—these unquestionably were great and important purposes which our Lord came to accomplish, and which by his life and doctrine he perfectly fulfilled. But if this were all that he did for us, however

highly we might venerate him as a teacher sent from God, it will be hard to explain in what sense he is said to be "The Lord our Righteousness," the "Propitiation for our sins," our "Mediator" and "Advocate," our "High-Priest" and "Intercessor." These are titles expressive of an office and character perfectly distinct from all who ever preceded or followed him, and utterly inapplicable to any other of the sons of men. Nor is it easy to perceive why his coming should have been introduced by so splendid an apparatus of prophecy and miracles, and by the peculiar system of the Jewish Law, unless something were to be effected through Him, in which all mankind, before as well as since that period, had an especial interest. If "Abraham rejoiced" in the expectation of His appearance; if in Christ "all the nations of the earth were to be blessed;" if He was "the desire of all nations;" if "as in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive;"—what can we infer, but that the benefits of redemption were to extend to the faithful through all ages, past, present, and to come; and that He by whom it was wrought is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever?"

We see then of what vast extent and magnitude is the profession, however simple it

may appear, of our belief in Christ as “the Lord our Righteousness.” It is to profess our hope of salvation through HIM only; that we “trust not in our own righteousness, but “in HIS manifold and great mercies;” that HE is “the propitiation for our sins, and not “for our’s only, but also for the sins of the “whole world,” to “deliver us from the wrath “to come^x.”

What a field also of practical instruction is here presented to our view! If to redeem us from the dreadful consequences of sin, it was ordained that the Son of God himself should thus quit the bosom of the Father, should veil the glories of his Godhead, and, though “in the form of God” and “equal with God,” make himself “of no reputation, and take “upon him the form of a servant,” and be “made in the likeness of men,” and “being “found in fashion as a man, humble himself, “and become obedient unto death, even the “death upon the cross^y”;—if all this was necessary for our deliverance, who shall presume to think lightly of the manifold transgressions to which the very best among us must plead guilty before God? When we reflect that every wilful transgression unrepented of renders us liable to condemnation;

^x 1 Thess. i. 10.

^y Phil. ii. 6, 7, 8.

and that even repentance, however sincere and ardent, can never expiate sin, or justify us in the sight of God; are we not almost irresistibly impelled to humble ourselves before the throne of His majesty, and to cry out with Job, “Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee^z?” How great then is the comfort, the hope, the encouragement, we may derive from those sacred oracles; which, while they warn us of the evil of sin, direct us where to find the remedy; which assure us, that “though our sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow^a,” that “God hath made HIM to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him^b,” and that the express purpose of his coming into the world is, that “all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life^c.”

Great, however, as this consolation is, and firm as are the foundations on which it rests, let us beware of the error of those, who, in their zeal to magnify the riches of God’s grace, and to extol this free gift of Redemption, would represent the merits of our Saviour, not only as rendering his sacrifice a perfect and all-sufficient atonement for our

^z Job xl. 4.

^a Isa. i. 18.

^b 2 Cor. v. 2.

^c John iii. 15.

sins, but as even superseding the necessity on our part of personal holiness and virtue. By some our Lord's righteousness is represented to be so transferred to true believers as to become *literally* their righteousness, and imputed to them as their own. From which doctrine the inference is readily drawn, that being thus, according to their accustomed phrase, "clothed in His righteousness," there is no need of any other righteousness to ensure their acceptance; that CHRIST having done every thing for them, nothing that they can do will either advance or hinder their salvation; that nothing more is necessary than to lay hold on Christ by faith, and thus to secure an interest in His merits. But with whatever confidence these positions may be assumed, how will they consist with the numberless practical exhortations engrafted by the sacred writers themselves upon these doctrines of Atonement and Justification? How will they consist even with the simple, but most significant precepts of St. Peter and St. Paul, "Add to your faith virtue"^d—"give all diligence to make your calling and election sure"^e—"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"^f?" Surely such instructions as these must convince us, that when

^d 2 Pet. i. 5.^e 2 Pet. i. 10.^f Phil. ii. 12.

Christ is said to be “our righteousness,” the expression can only mean, that for His sake, and in consideration of His merits and sufferings alone, our sins shall be remitted to us; but that to render them effectual to that purpose, our own co-operation is indispensably requisite. In any other sense than this, it does not appear that the righteousness of Christ can any more be said to be our righteousness, or imputed to us, than it can be supposed that when our Lord is said to have been “made sin for us,” it is meant that He was literally guilty of our sins. All that can safely be affirmed is this; that on our compliance with the terms of the Christian covenant, our faith is reckoned or imputed to us for righteousness, notwithstanding the imperfection which still necessarily adheres to all human actions, and notwithstanding the innumerable transgressions for which we should be otherwise amenable to the tribunal of Divine justice.

With this simple statement of a doctrine in which we are all so vitally interested let us content ourselves, without adventuring upon speculations leading to most dangerous errors. Ever let us remember that the truths of the Gospel, while they abound in consolation to all true penitents, encourage none to “continue in sin.” Christ is the “author of

“eternal salvation;” but it is to them who obey him. He is “an advocate with the Father” and a “propitiation for our sins;” but he will be the avenger of all such as “hold the truth in unrighteousness,” of all “who profess that they know God, but in works deny him.” These things we are commanded to “speak and exhort:” and that we may not speak and exhort in vain, let us beseech God to “stir up the wills of his faithful people, that they plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of Him be plenteously rewarded, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

SERMON XVII.

JOHN i. 14.

The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

THE incarnation of our blessed Saviour is that main article of the Christian faith, on which the whole system of our redemption depends; and on every point relating to this most important subject St. John's testimony may be deemed of peculiar value.

St. John survived all the other Apostles, and lived to so advanced an age as to witness the rise and progress of several pernicious errors. His Gospel was written many years after those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke; and his design in writing it appears to have been, not only to supply certain *facts* which it came not within their purpose to record, and to detail more largely than they had done some of our Lord's most remarkable *discourses*, but

also to select those narratives and discourses with special reference to the heretical opinions which had already begun to infest the Church. In one of his Epistles he observes, that “many deceivers were entered into the world, who confessed not that Jesus Christ was come in the flesh.” Some, it appears, denied his divinity; some, his human nature; others, that he was the Creator of the world. Each of these erroneous persuasions the Apostle seems to have had in view in the very opening of his Gospel, which he commences in these remarkable terms: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.”—“He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” Every part of this description tends to the refutation of one or other of the before-mentioned errors. The Apostle then sums up his statement in the comprehensive position

contained in the words of the text; “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Four distinct points are here presented to our consideration; first, our Lord’s divinity; secondly, his human nature; thirdly, his glory, thus manifested both as God and man; lastly, the gracious purpose of this wonderful dispensation.

1. With respect to the first point, our Lord’s divinity, it is evident, that the term “Logos,” or “Word,” is here to be understood of a *person* so denominated. It cannot denote a mere attribute of the Deity; since the Word is said not only to be “with God,” but to be “God” himself, and the personal pronoun is used throughout the context. “The same^a was in the beginning with God.” “All things were made by him^b; and without him^c was not any thing made that was made.” Still more emphatically does the text declare, that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” These expressions it seems impossible to interpret, but of a person assuming human nature. However highly figurative the style of Scripture may some-

^a οὗτος.

^b δι’ αὐτοῦ.

^c χωρὶς αὐτοῦ.

times be, and however intelligible, under certain circumstances, may be the personification of an abstract quality or attribute; yet to speak of an abstract idea as “becoming flesh,” and “dwelling among us” in that character, is a mode of speech, perhaps, without example, and certainly not warranted by any thing analogous to it in the sacred writings.

Passages of equivalent force and meaning, with reference to the same subject, are also found in other writers of the New Testament. St. Paul states it to be the “great mystery” of the Christian faith, that GOD was “manifest in the flesh^d.” He speaks of Christ as “the express image^e” of the Father, “the image of the invisible God^f,” who is “before all things^g,” “by whom all things consist^h,” and “in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodilyⁱ,” expressions, than which none can more perfectly coincide with St. John’s declarations. Nor is it less remarkable, that on almost every occasion when the Apostles or Evangelists advert to our Lord’s coming into the world, some phrase is used denoting his being of a nature superior to ours. Even the simple phrase, “coming in

^d 1 Tim. iii. 15.

^e Heb. i. 3.

^f Col. i. 15.

^g Col. i. 17.

^h Ibid.

ⁱ Col. ii. 9.

“the flesh,” is an instance of this, although the Socinians would fain allege it in proof that he was nothing more than man. A distinguished writer of that persuasion confidently refers to it, as if it meant the same as “coming *of* the flesh.” But, as his great antagonist acutely remarks, the expressions are quite distinct, and even dissimilar, in signification. To come *of* the flesh, is to be born exclusively of human parents, and to partake of their nature only; it precludes any pre-existent state of being, any nature antecedent or superior to that derived from the parent stock. To come *in* the flesh, conveys quite another meaning. It implies that the person of whom it is predicated might have come either in that nature or in some other; that nature not being originally inherent to him, but subsequently assumed for some special purpose. Accordingly, St. John expressly notes it as a mark of antichrist and a deceiver, to deny that Jesus Christ “came in the flesh;” clearly meaning the denial of his incarnation in the proper sense of the word^k; and not a denial that such a person as Jesus Christ had actually appeared among men; a fact which perhaps no one at that time pretended to dispute.

^k 1 John iv. 2, 3. also 2 John 7.

This, again, is further confirmed by a passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the Apostle represents our Lord's appearing in our nature to have been the result of his own voluntary determination: "For verily " he took not on him the nature of angels, " but he took on him the seed of Abraham¹." That our Lord had it in his power to make a choice between the natures he would assume, implies that he already possessed some other nature, not only distinct from either men or angels, but superior to both; a nature, indeed, above those of all created beings; since we cannot conceive a creature, however exalted, to have it in his power to take any other nature upon him than that assigned to him by his Creator. This mode of expression, therefore, simple as it appears to be, directly refutes the notion that our Lord had no existence before his conception in the Virgin's womb, or that he partook not of any nature but that of earthly parents. It is equally conclusive also against those who acknowledge his preexistence, and invest him with some high angelical or super-angelical dignity, but deny his essential divinity; since it shews that, "in the beginning," he was neither man nor angel, but so infinitely greater

¹ Heb. ii. 16.

than either, that he had it at his own command to unite himself to the one or the other at his good pleasure.

2. But secondly, the words of the text contain an express recognition of our Lord's human nature; "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."

The Scripture proofs of this point are abundantly clear and decisive. St. John seems to speak of the Godhead as rendered, in a certain sense, visible to mortal sight, by the union of the divine and human natures in the person of Christ. In no other way could it be visible. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him^m." In what sense we are to understand this, may be gathered from the same Apostle's expressions at the beginning of his first Epistle; "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of Life; (for the Life was manifested and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that Eternal Life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen

^m John i. 18.

“and heard declare we unto youⁿ.” This can only relate to the incarnation of our Lord ; by which one Person of the eternal Godhead became, as it were, perceptible to mortal sense. Not that any transmutation, any conversion, took place of the divine nature into human substance ; or that the essential properties of either were destroyed by the union of both. But that in Christ were visibly displayed the characteristic attributes of the one and the other. To this his whole conduct, his words and works, bore unequivocal testimony. As the declarations already cited establish his divinity ; so, innumerable instances might be given, in which the physical qualities of the manhood he had assumed were placed beyond all reasonable doubt. He was made like unto us in all respects, sin only excepted. He was tempted like as we are. He experimentally knew and was touched with a feeling of our infirmities. Hunger and thirst, pain and sorrow, suffering and death, were his portion. The *second* Adam was therefore as truly MAN as the *first* ; the proofs of which, from his life and actions, are so manifold, that any attempt to call this in question seems to argue a degree of perverseness almost inconceivable. Nevertheless, vi-

ⁿ 1 John i. 1, 2, 3.

sionaries were not wanting, even in the time of the Apostles, who taught that Christ was not actually a man; that he was so in appearance only, not in reality; that his sufferings as a mortal were only figurative; and that all the circumstances attending his passion and his crucifixion were illusions upon the senses of the beholders: notions so extravagantly absurd as hardly to deserve notice in these days, were it not evident that they did once prevail to no inconsiderable extent, and did they not shew how prone men are to adopt the grossest errors, when the plain sense of Scripture is set aside, to make room for the wanderings of their own imaginations.

In no instance, indeed, has inconsistency in the interpretation of Scripture been more strikingly exemplified, than in the very opposite errors which have prevailed respecting our Lord's incarnation; errors also, (strange to say!) that seem to have arisen from the very clear and unambiguous terms in which both our Lord's divine and human nature are set forth. Some, finding his Godhead so expressly asserted, imagined that what was said of his being "made flesh," could only be true in a metaphorical sense. Others, perceiving no less clearly the continual declarations of

his human properties, urged this in proof that he could not be possessed of Divine perfections, and tortured every passage to that effect, so as to bear some forced and incongruous meaning, unwarranted by the plainest rules of criticism. Both errors, contradictory as they are, may be traced to partial views of the subject, or to hazardous abstract speculations on what is beyond the grasp of the human intellect. Both equally originate in the vanity of endeavouring to be "wise above what is written," and wresting the Scriptures to a conformity with their own inadequate conceptions. It is moreover remarkable, that these attempts to remove difficulties have had, for the most part, an opposite effect; entangling the inquirers in still more inextricable perplexities. For, (distort the subject how we may,) the doctrine of our Lord's incarnation, taken in its simplest acceptation, meets us at every step. We find him speaking, acting, and suffering, in every respect as man; we find him also asserting and exercising powers, attributes, and perfections, exclusively belonging to God. Every thing recorded of him harmonizes with this twofold representation. But the instant we depart from either of these, all that is affirmed concerning him by Prophets, Apostles, or

Evangelists, becomes impenetrably obscure; the expositor finds himself perpetually embarrassed, unable to reconcile one text of Scripture with another, and driven to expedients which render the whole written word a source of doubt and darkness, rather than of light and information.

3. The third point suggested in the words of the text is the manifestation of the divine glory by this union of God and man in the person of our blessed Saviour: "We beheld "His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten "of the FATHER."

The glory of the SON OF GOD, in his twofold character, is inseparable from the glory of THE FATHER. It was manifested in his birth, his ministry, his doctrine, his life and conversation, his miracles, his fulfilment of prophecy, his death, his resurrection, his ascension. These bore testimony that "God "was in him of a truth." St. John, St. Peter, and St. James, were witnesses also to another extraordinary instance of his glory, his Transfiguration, when "there came such a voice to "him from the excellent glory, This is my "beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased °."

Under the Jewish dispensation there had been sundry manifestations of the Divine

° 2 Peter i. 17.

glory, awfully majestic, and signally displaying the agency of an almighty, though invisible hand. Yet many of these derived their chief importance from their connection with that ulterior purpose, the coming of the Messiah. To this they were preparatory; and they redounded to the glory of God the Father, as bearing reference to the great work of our redemption, in which the Divine power, and wisdom, and goodness, most transcendently shone forth. This is strikingly illustrated by the prophet Haggai, when encouraging the Jewish people in the work of rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem, he adverts to the consequences of the Messiah's appearance: "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, "yet once it is a little while, and I will shake "the heavens and the earth, and the sea, and "the dry land; and I will shake all nations, "and the Desire of all nations shall come, "and I will fill this house with glory, saith "the Lord of Hosts. The silver is mine, and "the gold is mine, saith the Lord of Hosts. "The glory of the latter house shall be "greater than that of the former, saith the "Lord of Hosts: and in this place will I give "peace, saith the Lord of Hosts^p." With reference to the personal appearance of Christ

^p Haggai ii. 6, 7, 8, 9.

in the temple, and not to the exterior grandeur of the temple itself, this prediction was delivered. In circumstances of outward splendour, the second temple was confessedly inferior to the first; and it was unaccompanied with those visible tokens of the Divine presence, the Shechinah, the Urim and Thummim, and the cloud of glory overshadowing the mercy-seat, which distinguished the temple of Solomon. But the want of these was, in the Prophet's contemplation of the event, to be infinitely more than compensated by the immediate and visible presence of HIM, of whose dignity these were but significant symbols. It was not silver and gold that were to be the glory of this latter house; but the fulfilment of that prophecy of Malachi, "The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in^q." It was the coming of "the Desire of all nations;" of him, whose name was to be "called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace^r." It was HIS glory which was to fill this Temple, and make its glory surpass that of the former. It was there that HE was to teach "with authority, and not as the Scribes;" there that

^q Malachi iii. 1.

^r Isaiah ix. 6.

“HIS word” was to be “with power;” there that by HIS miracles and HIS discourses he was to minister to the necessities both of the souls and bodies of men.

4. This leads us to the last point presented to our contemplation in the words of the text, the gracious purpose of this wonderful dispensation; the Word, the Son of God, thus manifested to the world, appeared “full of “grace and truth.”

By the coming of our Lord “in the flesh,” was made known to mankind the free and unmerited grace of God, in the remission of sins through HIS atonement and intercession, and in the gift of the Holy Spirit, enabling them to work out their salvation. He appeared “full of grace,” in bringing these glad tidings to the sons of men; “full of truth,” in verifying the promises made of old concerning him to the Patriarchs and Prophets, and in giving the most substantial proofs that what he promised he was all-powerful to perform. The glory of the Christian dispensation as far exceeded that of the Jewish, as the accomplishment of any good exceeds the expectation of it; the Gospel being in fact the completion of the Law; the Law, but the anticipation of the Gospel. The Law in itself, and apart from its connection with this better

covenant, was inefficient, either as to the expiation of guilt, or to a sanctifying influence upon the heart. It typified those blessings, and pointed to a future Saviour, through whom they should be obtained. For the Gospel it was reserved to realize these to the faithful of every age, and to carry into effect what the other had either mystically represented, or prophetically announced. "This," then, we may now say with St. John, "is the witness of GOD which He hath given of His SON:" and, "if we receive the witness of men;"—if we believe the testimony given by the Evangelists and Apostles, thus corresponding with the Law and the Prophets;—"the witness of GOD is greater^s;" that witness, which the very facts declared by the sacred historians assure us was actually given to the Son, by the Father himself who sent him.

Upon a retrospect, then, of this great subject in all its principal bearings, what a field is open for grateful contemplation! When we reflect upon the boundless compassion of God the Father, in providing the means of our redemption; upon the wonderful condescension of God the Son, in uniting his divine to our mortal nature, and, for our sakes, submitting to its bitterest degradation and suf-

^s 1 John v. 9.

ferings; and upon the all-sufficient aid imparted by God the Holy Ghost, to make us the children of God and heirs of eternal life; are we not constrained to exclaim with the Psalmist, “Lord, what is man, that thou art
“mindful of him; or the son of man, that
“thou so regardest him^t!”

Yet let us not be so wrapt up in the speculative contemplation of these great and undeserved mercies of God in Christ Jesus, as to be practically unmindful of the obligations they lay upon us. “For, behold, the day
“cometh,” saith the last of the Hebrew prophets, “that shall burn as an oven; and all the
“proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall
“be stubble: and the day that cometh shall
“burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts,
“that it shall leave them neither root nor
“branch. But unto you that fear my name
“shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with
“healing in his wings^u.” “Unto you that
“fear my name!”—unto you, that is, who lead such lives as becometh men professing godliness;—unto you who consider that the
“goodness of God leadeth you to repent-
“ance^x,” and that because “there is mercy
“with him, therefore shall he be feared^y”;—

^t Psalm viii. 4.

^u Malachi iv. 2.

^x Rom. ii. 4.

^y Psalm cxxx. 4.

unto you, who having been “signed with the
“sign of the cross,” will not be ashamed to
“confess the faith of Christ crucified, and
“manfully to fight under his banner against
“sin, the world, and the Devil, and to con-
“tinue Christ’s faithful soldiers and servants
“unto your lives’ end.” To such only do
these precious promises belong; and in such
only will they be effectually fulfilled.

With these thoughts deeply impressed upon
our minds, neither the cares nor the troubles,
neither the riches nor the pleasures of this
present world, will prevail to turn us aside
from the path we should pursue. Intent
upon “the high prize of the calling that is set
“before us,” we shall seek also to strengthen
these impressions by habitual recourse to all
the means of grace ordained for our growth
in godliness and virtue; more especially to
those “holy mysteries,” which on this high
festival^y we are now about to celebrate; mys-
teries instituted by our blessed Lord himself,
“as pledges of his love, and for the conti-
“nual remembrance of his death, to our great
“and endless comfort.” At his holy altar let
our vows of faith and obedience be renewed;
and while our hearts overflow with gratitude
for the mercies we ourselves rejoice in, let

^y Christmas-day.

them expand also in love and charity towards all mankind, for whom his precious blood was shed ; beseeching him, both for ourselves and others, to “have mercy upon us, to pardon “and deliver us from all our sins, to confirm “and strengthen us in all goodness, and to “bring us to everlasting life, through Jesus “Christ our Lord.”

SERMON XVIII.

JOHN xvi. 15.

All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of mine, and shew it unto you.

IT would be difficult to find in any of our Lord's discourses a stronger assertion of his Divinity than is contained in these words. Taken in connection with what precedes and follows them, they amount to a declaration of his equality with the Father, in one of the highest acts of infinite power and wisdom,—that of imparting spiritual gifts. They imply also, in their more general signification, an inseparable union and cooperation of the Holy Spirit with the Father and Himself, in all that relates to the work of man's salvation.

Throughout this memorable conversation with his Apostles on the eve of his sufferings, our Lord appears exceedingly solicitous to assure them that his place should be supplied

by another Comforter, who, though not visibly manifested to them, should give abundant proof of his actual presence, by miraculous signs and tokens; these affording such evidence of His immediate influence upon their understandings and affections as should leave no room to doubt of the source from which it flowed. The characters he ascribes to this heavenly Person are nothing short of attributes essentially divine. He was to “abide with them for ever;” to “teach them all things,” and “bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever Jesus had said unto them.” He was to come unto them “from the Father;” being “the Spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father,” to “guide them into all truth,” and to “shew them things to come.” He is represented also as having the same intimate knowledge of the Divine will and counsels as the Son himself. On these high prerogatives our Lord grounds the assurance, that the want of his own personal continuance among them would be amply compensated by the coming of this all-sufficient Guide and Instructor. Yet, great as these characters and prerogatives are, He speaks of Himself as equally entitled with the Father to the glory resulting from them: “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is

“ come, he will guide you into all truth : for
 “ he shall not speak of himself, but what-
 “ soever he shall hear, that shall he speak.
 “ He shall glorify ME : for he shall receive of
 “ mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things
 “ that the FATHER hath are MINE : there-
 “ fore said I, that he shall take of mine,
 “ and shew it unto you.” In this comprehen-
 sive assertion He clearly assumes to Himself,
 jointly with the Father, whatsoever is done by
 the Holy Spirit ; all the miraculous powers
 afterwards exercised by the Apostles, all the
 extraordinary as well as ordinary gifts be-
 stowed upon them for the great work of their
 ministry. Conformably with which asser-
 tion, St. Peter, on the day of Pentecost,
 speaks of the wonderful effusion of the Spirit
 at that time, as the act of Christ himself ;
 “ HE hath shed forth this, which ye now see
 “ and hear^a.” St. Paul virtually affirms the
 same, in applying to Christ that prophecy
 of the Psalmist, “ When he ascended up on
 “ high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts
 “ unto men^b.”

Now, the greater the characters and attri-
 butes here described as appertaining to the
 Holy Spirit, the greater is the proof hence
 derived of our Lord’s divinity ; since he ex-

^a Acts ii. 33.

^b Ephes. iv. 8.

pressly claims the glory of them, in saying that the Comforter, whom he was to send, should glorify HIM. Such glory could be due to GOD alone; therefore CHRIST is GOD. Therefore also the Spirit proceedeth from the Father and the Son. Whatsoever he receiveth from the Father, he receiveth from the Son also. Whatsoever he imparteth to the world of the divine counsels, he imparteth as in immediate co-operation with the Father and the Son. Hence a convincing argument might be raised in proof also of the divinity of the Holy Ghost. But our present purpose is simply to shew, from these as well as other declarations by our Lord himself, that from his own discourses alone abundant evidence may be collected in proof that he was indeed the SON OF GOD, in the fullest extent of that title, as including an essential participation in the Godhead itself.

The reason assigned in the words of the text for ascribing to Himself the gifts and graces bestowed by the Holy Spirit, is indeed decisive on this point: "All things that the Father hath are mine." We cannot imagine a more direct assumption of equality with the Father. However distinct as to personal relationship, if all things that the Father hath are HIS, can there be a doubt

that both partake of the same nature and perfections?

Elsewhere he has also affirmed this, in terms equally significant. Although he declared that he could “do nothing of himself” but what he saw the Father do;” that he “sought not his own will, but the will of the Father which had sent him;” that “as the Father had taught him, he spake these things;” that he had “not spoken of himself, but the Father which sent him gave him a commandment what he should say, and what he should speak;” and that “the Father that dwelt in him did the works” which he wrought; yet to these declarations he almost invariably subjoins expressions implying that he possessed a coordinate and co-equal authority with the Father. He declares that “all men should honour the SON, even as they honour the FATHER^c;” that “what things soever the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise^d;” that “as the Father knew HIM, even so knew HE the Father^e;” and that “He and the Father are ONE^f.” Twice the Jews charged him with blasphemy, in thus making himself “equal with God:” yet he reiterated these asser-

^c John v. 23.

^d John v. 19.

^e John x. 15.

^f John x. 30.

tions. In his private conversations with the Apostles, he did the same. "If ye had known me," he says, "ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen ME, hath seen the FATHER; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?"

But we scarcely need go further for evidence of this kind, than his habitually assuming the appellation of the SON OF GOD. The manner in which he applied this title to himself was so well understood by the Jews, that they grounded upon it a direct charge of blasphemy: "Therefore," says St. John, "the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his FATHER, making himself equal with God^h." Such was the construction the Jews put upon his assumption of that title. The primitive fathers of the Church did the same. "To call him the only-begotten, or the Son of

^g John xiv. 7—10.

^h John v. 18.

“ God the Father,” Dr. Waterland observes, “ was in their account declaring him to be of “ the same nature with God the Father; as “ truly GOD as the Son of Man is truly “ MAN.” There is no instance, indeed, in Scripture of this title being individually applied to any other person, except once to Adam; and that in a peculiar sense, as coming immediately out of the hands of his Creator, and not born of any earthly parent. But our Lord uses it familiarly of himself, with manifest reference to his mysterious union with the Deity. Thus when the Jews were about to stone him for making himself God, “ Jesus “ answered them, Is it not written in your “ Law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them “ gods unto whom the word of God came, “ and the Scripture cannot be broken, say ye “ of him whom the Father hath sanctified “ and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, “ because I said I am the Son of God? If I “ do not the works of my Father, believe me “ not. But if I do, though ye believe not “ me, believe the works; that ye may know “ and believe that the Father is in me, and I “ in Himⁱ:”—that is, If in a far inferior sense the title of Gods has been given to men invested only with earthly power, do ye charge

ⁱ John x. 34—38.

me with blasphemy in assuming the title in its highest sense; whose claim to it was announced on my conception in the womb, and ratified by a voice from heaven at my baptism; and who have since by my own words and works given proof incontestable of my Divine authority? When again, in answer to the High-Priest's solemn question, "I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the SON OF GOD?" "Jesus answered, I AM^k;"—in what sense was it possible for those around him to understand this answer, but in the same sense in which the question was put; as affirming, without hesitation or ambiguity, the very point on which they were most solicitous to condemn him?

Another evidence of the same kind arises from the frequent intimations given by our Lord of his preexistent state of being. This is implied in every declaration he made of his coming from God, and having been sent into the world by the Father; expressions essentially distinguishing him from every human being of human parentage only. In his conversation with Nicodemus, who was slow in apprehending the spiritual truths communicated to him, our Lord uses language of a

^k Matt. xxvi. 63, 64. and Mark xiv. 61, 62.

still higher cast, to indicate his heavenly character: "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven¹;" implying, that unless he had himself been in heaven, had come down from heaven, and were still there with respect to his divine nature, such revelations could not have been made by him as those which he delivered. To his chosen disciples, perplexed in like manner by some of his mysterious doctrines, he uses similar, or even more definite expressions; "Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before^m?" enforcing their belief in his doctrine by an assertion of his pre-existent condition not to be misunderstood. Still stronger are the terms he adopts on another occasion. Contending with the Jews who indignantly reviled him for setting himself above Abraham and the Prophets, he terminates the dispute in these memorable words, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I amⁿ;" language only paralleled in dignity and sublimity by Jehovah's

¹ John iii. 12, 13. ^m John vi. 62. ⁿ John viii. 58.

own designation of himself to Moses, "I AM
" THAT I AM°."

In the same consciousness of an inherent authority above all created beings, he recites prophecies from the Old Testament characterizing him by the title, Lord, in a sense applicable to the Deity alone. In one instance particularly, the argument from this coincidence was found irresistible. "While the
" Pharisees and Scribes were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think
" ye of Christ? Whose son is he? They say
" unto him, The Son of David. He saith
" unto them, How then doth David in spirit
" call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto
" MY LORD, Sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool? If
" David then call him LORD, how is he his
" SON^p?" The reasoning turns upon this divine title being applied to Christ, the Son of David; and so inevitable was the inference to be drawn from it, that "no man," adds the Evangelist, "was able to answer him a word,
" neither durst any man from that day forth
" ask him any more questions."

Further; our Lord suffered acts of adoration to be paid to him, and forbade them not. We read of persons who in asking or receiv-

° Exod. iii. 14.

p Matt. xxii. 41—45.

ing his miraculous aid, addressed him in expressions of direct supplication or thanksgiving. Is it to be imagined that he would accept homage of this kind, homage never allowed to Prophets or other messengers of God, had not his pretensions to it been altogether dissimilar to their's? Even of his own disciples, St. Matthew has recorded that twice they *worshipped* him; and St. Luke relates, that on his Ascension they did the same. St. John has more distinctly narrated the memorable confession of the apostle Thomas, on being permitted to identify his body risen from the grave, "My Lord and my God!" a confession, which, far from his discouraging or repelling it, drew from our Lord the remarkable declaration, that blessed were they who though they had not seen what Thomas had seen, should yet believe as he had done, and be ready to testify their belief with the same ardour and devotion.

In many other instances did he, by implication at least, assert powers and prerogatives exclusively appertaining to God. He wrought a miracle on the paralytic, to prove that he had power to forgive sins. He declared that he had power to lay down his life, and power to take it again. He foretold that the general resurrection was to be the act of his own

omnipotence in union with the Father ;—“ as
 “ the Father raiseth up the dead, and quick-
 “ eneth them, even so the Son quickeneth
 “ whom he will^q.” The same he affirms of
 his coming to judge the world : “ The Father
 “ judgeth no man, but hath committed all
 “ judgment unto the Son^r.” His disciples
 ascribe omniscience to him, and he reproves
 them not ;—“ Lord, thou knowest all things^s.”
 His omnipresence he thus asserts ; “ Where
 “ two or three are gathered together in my
 “ name, there am I in the midst of them^t ;” and
 again, in his last interview with his Apostles,
 “ Lo, I am with you always, even unto the
 “ end of the world^u.” By uniting also his own
 name with the Father and the Holy Ghost
 in the form of Baptism, he has left a perpe-
 tual testimony of his equality with them in
 the Godhead, which from age to age has
 baffled and refuted every impugner of his
 Divinity.

To give additional force to these and many
 similar testimonies that might be collected,
 it is of importance to observe that there was
 no greater stumblingblock to the Jews in ge-
 neral, than his thus assuming a divine cha-
 racter ; and that they held in the greatest

^q John v. 21.

^r John v. 22.

^s John xi. 17.

^t Matt. xviii. 20.

^u Matt. xxviii. 20.

abhorrence every thing that seemed to derogate from the absolute unity of the Supreme Being. It is therefore so much the more remarkable, that he should habitually speak of himself in terms which not only militated so strongly against their feelings and persuasions, but which, upon the supposition that his pretensions to Divinity had no just foundation, could hardly fail to lead them into a most fatal error. Surely, he, “who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth,” would never thus have given occasion to the delusion of his hearers, had he been nothing more than a creature like ourselves, or not indeed a partaker of that “fulness of the Godhead,” of which he gave assurances so ample and so unequivocal.

The Apostles, throughout their writings, abundantly confirm these testimonies of our Lord himself, and establish them as the foundation of the whole Christian system. These sacred authors had, doubtless, been fully instructed by him, in this as well as every other essential point, during the forty days in which he continued with them after his resurrection, “speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” Still further were they instructed in these truths, after that descent of the Holy Spirit upon

them, which he had so expressly foretold. Their writings are therefore to be regarded as infallible comments of the Spirit of Truth upon whatever HE had before delivered to them. But the root and foundation of every essential article of our faith is unquestionably to be found in the records of our Lord's own personal communications with his Apostles, and of his discourses to the multitude around him. Some of the most prominent of these it has been the object of the present discourse to bring together in one collective point of view, in order to give to the doctrine deduced from them the strongest possible authority, that of our blessed Saviour himself.

The proofs which have thus been brought forward are neither subtle nor obscure. They lie upon the very surface of the sacred writings, and can hardly escape the eye of the most cursory observer. But they are not of the less intrinsic value. That which was intended to make an impression upon minds the least capable of deep investigation, and which appears actually to have made such an impression, was delivered in the most unambiguous terms: and by these plain and simple declarations such as are more recon-dite or questionable will be most successfully interpreted. We know, indeed, but too well,

the labours of many opponents of this doctrine to render even the clearest of these evidences dark and doubtful, or altogether to set them aside. But if any thing can add to the force of the arguments drawn from these texts of Scripture in their plain and obvious signification, it is the manifest difficulty under which such writers labour in endeavouring to distort their meaning.

Without searching, then, after remote evidence, without affecting profound disquisitions, and without attempting to know more of the mysteries of God than he hath seen fit to reveal, or more than can be made intelligible to Christians of the lowliest attainments, a body of substantial proof is thus presented to our contemplation, above all suspicion either as to the purity of its source or its title to demand our unqualified reception. It is Christ himself who says, "All things that the Father hath are mine." It is Christ who calls himself "the Son of God," who declares his eternal pre-existence, who applies to himself the title of Lord; who accepts divine worship as his due; who claims authority to forgive sins, to raise himself from the dead, and to judge the world; who assumes omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence; who places himself on an equality

with the Father and the Holy Ghost in the solemn rite of Baptism.

If He, then, who established the truth of whatever he affirmed by signs and wonders and indisputable manifestations of “power “from on high,” bore such testimony of himself; we trust that we neither deceive nor are deceived, in inculcating these doctrines upon mankind. And if he who revealed these truths declared it to be the purpose of his so revealing them “that all who believe in him “should not perish, but have everlasting life;” then does it behove us to consider well, what obligations are hereby laid upon us to “make “our calling and election sure.” We know whom we have believed; “a Saviour, which “is Christ the Lord;”—a Mediator between God and man, who in himself united both the Godhead and the manhood; an all-powerful Lawgiver and Ruler; and the same who will hereafter come to be our Judge. We know likewise what remains to be done on our part, and the final retribution that awaits us. Such is our faith, such our duty, such our expectations. And “if we know these things, happy “are we if we do them*.”

* John xiii. 17.

SERMON XIX.

JOHN v. 27.

And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.

THERE are two remarkable appellations by which our Saviour is frequently described in the New Testament, the *Son of God*, and the *Son of Man*. To understand in what peculiar or appropriate sense these titles are given to him, is requisite to a right apprehension of many passages of Scripture.

The appellations themselves may be used in a general or in a particular signification.

In a general acceptation, angels and men are called “sons of God;” since both owe their existence to the supreme Author of all being. When Job says that at the creation “all the sons of God shouted for joy,” it is evident that he speaks of angels and all the heavenly host. When our Lord enjoins his

disciples to pray to God as their heavenly Father, it is implied that they stand in that relationship to the Almighty as their Creator. And when St. John, speaking of the privileges of the faithful, says, "Behold what manner "of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, "that we should be called the sons of God^a," he clearly refers to all who partake of the special privileges of the Christian dispensation.

The general application of the term "Son of man" is equally intelligible. When the Psalmist says, "Lord, what is man, that thou "art mindful of him, or the son of man, that "thou so regardest him^b?"—we instantly perceive that the one expression, as well as the other, denotes mankind in general, the whole human race, to whom the Almighty extends his benevolent regard. And even when applied individually, as it is to the prophet Ezekiel throughout his prophecy, it admits of no other than its common acceptation; since it is not associated with any thing relative to his character or circumstances which can give it a peculiar signification.

But it will be found, that when applied to our blessed Saviour, both these titles are manifestly intended to convey an extraordinary,

^a 1 John iii. 1.

^b Psalm viii. 4.

an appropriate signification, inapplicable to any but himself. From the manner in which they were used by him, and in which they appear to have been understood by the Jews, every attentive reader may perceive that they bore some special reference to his character and office as the CHRIST, the Saviour and Redeemer of mankind.

Respecting the title, *Son of God*, occasion was taken, in a former discourse on the proofs of our Lord's divinity from his own declarations, to advert to it as one of those frequent and unequivocal indications of his Divine character, which his adversaries found it impossible either to resist or to evade. In the present discourse, it is my purpose to offer some brief observations of a similar kind on the title *Son of Man*, as assumed by our Lord in conjunction with the other, and then to consider it more especially as connected with the authority he asserts to be given him, in the words of the text, hereafter to judge the world, "because he is the Son of man."

That this title relates to his *human* nature there can be no question: but that it denotes also something peculiar to him, as distinct from the rest of mankind, it is hardly possible not to perceive. In several of his conferences with the Jews, *both* appellations,

the Son of God and the Son of man, seem to be used as equally appertaining to him as the Christ. When the high priest asked, "Art thou the CHRIST, the SON OF GOD;" Jesus having answered in the affirmative, immediately adds, "Hereafter shall ye see the SON OF MAN sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven^c." When Nathanael addressed him, saying, "Rabbi, thou art the SON OF GOD, thou art the King of Israel," he replied, "Hereafter ye shall see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the SON OF MAN^d." In the passage connected with the text, the same association of these terms occurs; "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the SON OF GOD; and they that hear shall live. For as the FATHER hath life in himself, so hath he given the SON to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the SON OF MAN." In all these instances, the interchange of the two titles is very remarkable, and clearly indicates some special and appropriate sense, in which they characterised *Him*

^c Matt. xxvi. 63, 64.

^d John i. 49, 51.

exclusively, and could not be similarly applied to any other.

It is a still further evidence of this, that our Lord calls himself the Son of man, not only when describing the humiliation to which, in that character, he submitted, but even when asserting and exercising the highest acts of divine authority. Although, as Son of man, he “had not where to lay his head,” and was to “be betrayed into the hands of men,” and to “suffer many things;” yet it was also as Son of man that he declared he had “power “on earth to forgive sins^e,” that he was “Lord of the sabbath^f,” and that at the end of the world he was to “come in the glory of “his Father, with the holy angels^g.” In every part of the great work he had undertaken for our redemption, whether suffering or triumphant, whether with reference to his state of glorification or of humiliation, we find him assuming this distinction, as no less applicable to the one case than to the other. Nor is it difficult to apprehend the reason of this. The appellation of Son of man, thus assumed as a distinctive characteristic, appears to have had reference to his being that one and only descendant of Adam, the promised seed, the

^e Matt. ix. 6.

^f Mark ii. 28.

^g Mark viii. 38.

great Deliverer of mankind, foretold from the beginning to our first parents, and subsequently to the patriarchs and the prophets. The person so foretold was both to suffer and to conquer. His heel was to be bruised by the seed of the serpent, and He was to bruise the serpent's head. By Him, as the representative of the whole human race, their great adversary was to be destroyed. From Adam they had derived sin and condemnation; through Him they were to obtain pardon and justification. For "as in Adam all die, even "so in Christ shall all be made alive^h." Hence he is called the *second* Adam, in contradistinction to the *first*; and the *old* and the *new man* are expressions used to contrast the depraved state of mankind through the transgression of Adam, with their renovated state through the redemption by Christ. With reference to these distinguishing characteristics of the Messiah, it appears that our Lord is emphatically designated the Son of man; and the Jews seem clearly to have understood that this title emphatically belonged to that great Deliverer whose coming had been foretold. Had they also duly considered the full force of a designation so significant and so comprehensive, they might have been less

^h 1 Cor. xv. 22.

reluctant to acknowledge that the person to whom it belonged, though he was to be of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, and of the family of David, was nevertheless to be one in whom all mankind, every son of Adam, would have an equal interest with themselves.

These observations however will derive much additional force from being considered in connection with the remarkable declaration contained in the words of the text.

Our Lord here affirms, that the Father “hath given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man.” He had before said, “The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son; that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.” The honour to be given to the Son equally with the Father, could only be the honour which is due to God; and the authority to judge the world seems necessarily to include the divine attributes of omnipotence and omniscience. But the reason assigned, “because he is the Son of man,” shews that this office specially appertained to God the Son, in consequence of his taking our nature upon him. It shews also, that it will be executed by him in that same twofold character of God and man which

he sustained here on earth. Of this the angels who appeared at his ascension expressly forewarned his disciples; "Ye men of Galilee, " why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This " same Jesus, which is taken up from you into " heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye " have seen him go into heavenⁱ." That he will then appear in his human character is confirmed also by what St. Paul says; " God " hath appointed a day in which he will judge " the world in righteousness, by that Man " whom he hath ordained^k."

This corresponds moreover with those passages of Holy Writ which represent our Lord's exaltation and dominion as the consequences of his resurrection and ascension. " Him," says St. Peter, " hath God exalted " with his right hand, to be a Prince and a " Saviour^l." St. Paul likewise, after speaking of his being " found in fashion as a man," and becoming " obedient unto death," adds, " Wherefore God also hath highly exalted " him, and given him a name which is above " every name; that at the name of Jesus every " knee should bow, of things in heaven, and " things in earth, and things under the earth; " and that every tongue should confess that

ⁱ Acts i. 11.^k Acts xvii. 31.^l Acts v. 31.

“JESUS CHRIST is LORD, to the glory of God “the Father^m.” These, then, are prerogatives evidently ascribed to him by virtue of his becoming the Son of man. The divine powers essentially inherent to him as Son of God could admit of no additional exaltation. They equally belonged to him before and after his coming in the flesh. It was only as Son of man, that the dignity of his nature could thus be raised. To the man Christ Jesus these expressions, therefore, must be applied.

Every thing, indeed, which our Lord did or suffered for the redemption of mankind, derived peculiar importance from his twofold character. The power of the Godhead gave to the sacrifice upon the cross, in his human nature, its full and entire efficacy. The same power still renders him an all-sufficient Mediator and Intercessor. The same invests him with authority to judge both quick and dead. When he is said to receive authority from the Father for these purposes, it is because, having vouchsafed for a while to veil his divinity by uniting it with our mortal nature, he thenceforth became subject, voluntarily subject, to the Father, in that special character which he had assumed. He submitted to this, because he had vouchsafed to

^m Phil. ii. 9, 10, 11.

become Son of man. In his human nature, he was accordingly susceptible of humiliation and exaltation, of suffering and rejoicing, of honour and dishonour, of evil report and good report, of the bitterest evils of mortality, and the highest glories of heaven.

The attempt, however, to explain this united operation of the Godhead and manhood must baffle our utmost ingenuity. We only know, from the testimony of himself and his Apostles, that these constantly co-operated to effect the purpose of his coming. He who assumed to himself the appellations of the Son of God and the Son of man;—He who at one time said, “I and my Father are one,” and at another time, “My Father is greater than I;”—He who spake of the Divine attributes as his own, and yet professed entire submission to the Divine will; was assuredly such an one as these extraordinary declarations, in their plain and obvious meaning, denoted him to be. This mystery we receive through faith in Him who said, “To this end was I born, and for this end came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truthⁿ.”

If now from these high and awful contemplations we turn to that special consideration

ⁿ John xviii. 37.

resulting from them, which is set before us in the text, how deeply shall we find ourselves affected by them as to our own personal interests!

If there be any one thought which, more than another, may be supposed to excite in the mind of man apprehensions approaching to terror and dismay, it is surely the expectation of being brought to judgment at the tribunal of a Being of infinite majesty, power, knowledge, holiness, and justice. How can man be justified in his sight? His angels he “chargeth with folly.” “The heavens are “not pure in his sight.” “How much less, “man that is a worm!”—It is among the most invaluable blessings of the Christian dispensation, that it tends to allay these disquietudes, by unfolding to us a system of pardon and reconciliation, such as it could not otherwise have entered into the heart of man to conceive. Yet even under this gracious dispensation, so infinitely do we fall short of the measure of our duty, so tinctured with infirmity and imperfection are the best services we can perform, that the thought of appearing before Him “who is of purer eyes “than to behold iniquity,” can hardly be entertained even by the most blameless Christian, without awful emotions.

Now the text informs us to whom the authority is committed to “execute judgment.” It is given to the Son of man, and *because* he is the Son of man. It is given to Him who, having vouchsafed to take our nature upon him, has had actual participation of our infirmities, our trials, our temptations. “We have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin^o.” And this is He who will “hereafter come to be our Judge.” For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. It is as the *Christ* that he will exercise this divine prerogative. “Both he that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified,” says the Apostle, “are all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren^p :” and “forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same^q.” Thus the character of our Judge, though invested with the authority of the Most High, is brought nearer to the level of our apprehensions; and we are enabled to regard it with a somewhat more stedfast eye. He, indeed, not only knew, but felt what was in man. He wept for the calamities of men, pitied their frail-

^o Heb. iv. 15.^p Heb. ii. 11.^q Heb. ii. 14.

ties, had compassion on their ignorance, patiently endured their contradictions, exercised towards them continual mercy and forbearance, prayed for his bitterest enemies and persecutors. To HIM this last and highest act of sovereign power is committed, by which is to be determined the final destination of every human being. Can we sufficiently admire the lenity, as well as the equity of this Divine appointment? Do we not discern in it the most striking features of condescension to human infirmity? How entirely does it harmonize with every part of that beneficent system, which proceeded from Him who “is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”!

But it is not only in this respect that we are to contemplate the fitness of our Lord, as Son of man, to take this office upon him. It was in his human character that he withstood the assaults of the Tempter; that he obtained for us the victory over sin and death; that he bruised the serpent’s head; that “by death he destroyed him that had the power of death;” that he “spoiled principalities and powers, and triumphed over them;” that he “led captivity captive, and obtained gifts for men.” These things he did while he

† 2 Peter iii. 9.

was yet “in the flesh;” while he “was found
“in fashion as a man,” and “humbled him-
“self unto death, even the death upon the
“cross.” His sufferings wrought our deli-
verance; His humiliation our triumph. “For
“it became Him,” says the Apostle, “for whom
“are all things, and by whom are all things,
“in bringing many sons unto glory, to make
“the Captain of their salvation perfect through
“sufferings^s ;” and having thus “perfected for
“ever them that are sanctified, this man”—
the man Christ Jesus—“for ever sat down on
“the right hand of God, from henceforth ex-
“pecting till his enemies be made his foot-
“stool^t.” So far, however, was this his cha-
racter of Son of Man from being in any of
these points disconnected from that of the
Son of God, that without the latter the for-
mer would have wanted that which not only
distinguished him from every other human
being, but gave efficacy to all that he did and
suffered. His human faculties, far from an-
nulling his divine prerogatives, manifested
them so much more distinctly to the world,
and, perhaps, in the only way in which they
could have been rendered perceptible to mor-
tal observation. In vain, then, would the im-
pugners of his divinity set these at variance

^s Heb. ii. 10.^t Heb. x. 13.

with each other. Their union is that which constitutes his essential character as the Christ, and that which gives to our faith its strongest and surest hold upon the mind. When he said, that “the Father had given “him authority to execute judgment because “he was the Son of Man,” it was not because he was a mere man, and nothing more; but because HE only, of the Persons in the Godhead, took upon him the nature of man. Still, therefore, it is GOD who will judge the world, though he will judge it by that MAN whom he hath ordained. The judgment delegated to him as Son of Man will be executed by Divine power, because he is also Son of God: and when he shall come to judge the quick and dead, He will come in the glory of the Father, with his angels, to reward every man according to his works.

Let not occasion, then, be taken to think less seriously of the awful day that is approaching, as if we were to be judged by merely such an one as ourselves. Every representation of him in his judicial character sets forth his infinite power, holiness, and justice, no less than his mercy and goodness. The Baptist described him as one “whose “fan is in his hand, and who will thoroughly “purge his floor, and gather his wheat into

“ the garner, but will burn up the chaff with “ unquenchable fire^u :” and he himself portrays his own character in the parable of “ the householder and reapers,” in similar terms. He will “ bring to light the hidden “ things of darkness, and make manifest the “ counsels of the heart^x.” Here is enough to arouse the careless and impenitent to a sense of danger, notwithstanding the consolation and encouragement which every humble and sincere penitent may derive from the assurance that he will be judged by One who “ knoweth our frame, and remembereth that “ we are dust.” It will therefore be our wisdom and our duty to contemplate Him as that omniscient Being, “ unto whom all hearts are “ open, all desires known, and from whom no “ secrets are hid.” Nor let it be forgotten, that if as Son of man he is touched with a feeling of our infirmities and of the dangers that beset us ; He is also no less able to discern whether or not these are deceitfully pleaded in extenuation of our guilt. Ever, then, let it be borne in mind that the dispensation of the Gospel, though full of mercy and benevolence, and originating in the most perfect love to mankind, is nevertheless a system of holiness, purity, and truth. It is “ the

^u Matt. iii. 12.

^x 1 Cor. iv. 5.

“power of God unto salvation unto every
 “one that believeth^y,” and whose faith is
 productive of its proper fruits. But what-
 ever delusive expectations we may be disposed
 to cherish, “the hope of the hypocrite shall
 “perish^z.” For “the grace of God, that
 “bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all
 “men, teaching us that, denying ungodli-
 “ness and worldly lusts, we should live so-
 “berly, righteously, and godly in this pre-
 “sent world; looking for that blessed hope,
 “and the glorious appearing of the great
 “God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave
 “himself for us, that he might redeem us
 “from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a
 “peculiar people, zealous of good works^a.”

“Now unto him that is able to keep you
 “from falling, and to present you faultless
 “before the presence of his glory with ex-
 “ceeding joy, to the only wise God our Sa-
 “viour, be glory and majesty, dominion and
 “power, now and ever^b. Amen.”

^y Rom. i. 16.

^z Job viii. 13.

^a Titus ii. 14.

^b Jude 24.

SERMON XX.

HEBREWS vii. 25.

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

THERE is none of the sacred writers who has treated the subject of the Christian dispensation so systematically as St. Paul has done; nor is there any of St. Paul's writings in which the comparison between that and the Jewish economy is so fully drawn out as in his Epistle to the Hebrews.

The general design of this Epistle is, to shew that the ritual Law of Moses was a typical or figurative service, introductory to the Gospel; that its institutions were, for the most part, no otherwise efficacious than as connected with that Redeemer whom they foreshewed; that to him they bore testimony, and in him were fulfilled; and that this purpose having been accomplished, they ceased, and gave way to that better covenant which had long before been promised, and which

was the consummation of all the Divine proceedings for the redemption of mankind. This view of the subject, though addressed to Jewish converts, and founded upon the Jewish scriptures, is no less interesting to every Christian reader. The New Testament depends upon the Old for some of its most substantial evidences; nor can any thing tend more to heighten our veneration of both, than this their mutual harmony and coincidence. By this they are shewn to have been equally the result of the Divine counsels, and equally indispensable to the fulfilment of those gracious purposes of the Almighty.

Among various other topics specifically touched upon by the Apostle relative to this connection betwixt the two dispensations, that of the priesthood is largely discussed. The Jewish priesthood was ordained for local and temporary circumstances; the Christian is distinguished by its permanent and universal character. Our Lord differed from all who had preceded him in the sacerdotal office, in that he held it, “not after the law
“of a carnal commandment”—not subject to decay and death—“but after the power of
“an endless life.” He was to abide “for
“ever.” He was to exercise the mediatorial

^a Heb. vii. 16.

office, after his departure from this world, and until the final consummation of all things, in the immediate presence of God. "They truly," says the apostle, "were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue, by reason of death. But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

To this striking contrast the Apostle subjoins another, grounded on the perfection of our Lord's character, to which none before Him could lay claim. "Such an High Priest," he observes, "became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needed not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the Law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the Law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore^b." "And now," adds the Apostle in the beginning of the next chapter, "of the things which we have spoken

^b Heb. vii. 26, 27, 28.

“ this is the sum. We have such an High
“ Priest, who is set on the right hand of the
“ throne of the majesty in the heavens; a
“ minister of the sanctuary, and of the true
“ tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not
“ man.” And again, “ now hath he obtained
“ a more excellent ministry, by how much
“ also he is the Mediator of a better cove-
“ nant, which was established upon better
“ promises ^c.”

In the discussion of this subject two chief points present themselves to our consideration; first, the necessity that existed for a more powerful and efficient Mediator and Intercessor than any institutions antecedent to the Gospel could supply; secondly, the certainty that we have such a Mediator in the person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It is a remarkable circumstance, that in every known religion, even where no distinct traces can be found of its being derived from Revelation, the necessity of an Intercessor between God and man appears to have been virtually acknowledged. Among the imaginary deities of the Gentile world, some were invoked as gods of a subordinate kind, through whom, it was supposed, access was

^c Heb. viii. 1, 2, 6.

to be had to the Father of gods and men : and even these, as well as the superior divinities, were only approached through the medium of a sacred order of men offering gifts and sacrifices, and other devotional services, which the worshippers in general were not deemed qualified to perform. The institution of a priesthood seems, indeed, in itself to imply an acknowledgment, a consciousness, on the part of those worshippers, that none were worthy to hold communion with the gods, unless in some way consecrated for that purpose. Here we discern the rude lineaments, at least, of that doctrine which to us is more distinctly made known by the light of Revelation. And whether we suppose this common and prevailing notion among mankind to have originated in their natural feelings of unworthiness to come before God, or in some remote tradition handed down to them from patriarchal times, the testimony, in point of weight, is nearly the same. It shews the universality of the sentiment, and indicates that it has a deep foundation in the exigencies of human nature.

No persuasion, indeed, seems to be more congenial than this with the feelings of every one who has not formed to himself either some derogatory conceptions of the Supreme

Being, or some unwarrantable conceits of his own perfection. To say nothing of the immeasurable distance between the creature and the Creator, between infinite perfection and such finite excellencies as the very best of men can attain unto; there is a fearful and seemingly insurmountable barrier between the sinner and his God. Without the assurance of some expiation for his offences, who would not dread to approach a Judge, "unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid?" And even when this expiation is found, who may venture to plead it before God, without the intervention of the party through whom the expiation has been made? Who can be an effective mediator, but the one who himself hath provided the ransom to be paid?

With a sense of this general necessity for some intercessor between God and man, the reverence attached to the sacerdotal character is evidently connected. The ideas are correlative, and almost inseparable from each other. As such, they are expressly recognised under the Jewish dispensation. "Every high priest," says St. Paul, "taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts

“and sacrifices for sins^d.” No offerings of any kind, prayers, thanksgivings, or sacrifices, were deemed fit to be presented to the Almighty, but through those who were invested with that sacred character.

But since this office, when administered by men, fallible and peccable like their fellow creatures, can be no otherwise efficacious than as representative of something more worthy of the Divine acceptance; they who, either from ignorance of revelation, or from a blind and superstitious reverence for the office itself, trust to it without reference to that from which it derives its only value, can have no solid ground for confidence. As they who believed that “the blood of bulls and of goats” could take away sin, without the atoning virtue of the Redeemer whom they typified, did but deceive their own souls; so they who imagine that the priest, by virtue of any authority or sanctity of his own, independent of the one great Intercessor in whose name he acts, can perform the work of effectual mediation, are manifestly under a similar delusion. Upon this ground, the Apostle urges upon the Jews, that their ceremonial Law had reference throughout to a higher dispensation; and he labours to shew the absolute futility

^d Heb. v. 1.

of the most important of their religious services, when disconnected from that Redeemer through whom alone they could be rendered available to the purpose for which they were ordained.

The necessity of an Intercessor who “is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him,” being thus established; we are next to inquire into the certainty that we have such an Intercessor in the person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Apostle’s train of reasoning in his Epistle to the Hebrews, leaves nothing to desire on this momentous point. Having first laid down the fundamental doctrine of our Lord’s divinity, declaring that he was “the Son of God, the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person^e,” he adverts to his having been “made lower than the angels, for the suffering of death,” and afterwards “crowned with glory and honour.” The purpose of his suffering is stated to be, that he might “taste death for every man,” and be “a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the people^f.” He observes, that though our blessed Saviour

^e Heb. i. 3.

^f Heb. ii. 7, 17.

was “touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and was in all points tempted like as we are, yet he was without sin^g,” and in this respect essentially differed from every other who had been invested with the mediatorial office:—“Every high priest taken from among men is himself also compassed with infirmity, and, by reason hereof, ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins,” but “Christ being made perfect, became the Author of salvation to all them that obey him^h:” and hence our hope in him is “an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfastⁱ.” After further illustrating this by a comparison of our Lord’s priesthood with that of Aaron under the Mosaic Law, and with that of Melchisedec under the patriarchal dispensation, the Apostle shews that though the Levitical sacrifices had all the pomp and circumstance that could give them estimation in the eye of the worshipper, yet they were defective as to intrinsic worth, nor was it possible that, of themselves, they could “take away sins.” He only who said, “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God^k,” could supply this imperfection. All this is evidently intended to shew that our Lord had by his

^g Heb. iv. 15

^h Heb. v. 1, 2, 3, 9.

ⁱ Heb. vi. 19.

^k Heb. x. 4, 9.

death made a full and sufficient sacrifice and atonement for sin, and thus laid the foundation of his effectual intercession at the throne of grace.

The proof, however, that this sacrifice was actually accepted by the Father, and that he became in consequence our all-powerful Mediator and Advocate, results more immediately from his Resurrection and Ascension. Hence the same Apostle's triumphant exclamation in his Epistle to the Romans;—"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us¹." On these incontrovertible evidences St. Paul grounds our belief in the efficacy both of his *atonement* and of his *intercession*. The one follows from the other as a necessary consequence. No longer could it be a matter of doubt, whether our Lord had entirely accomplished the great work he had undertaken; whether he was indeed the Lord of Hosts, the King of Glory; whether he was able to make good his promises; whether "all that the Father had was his," and "whatsoever his disciples should

¹ Rom. viii. 33, 34.

“ask in his name, he would give it them.” These truths were established beyond all contradiction by those manifestations of Divine power so signally displayed.

They who duly appreciate such truths and such evidences, will hardly need to be fortified against the attempts of those who either altogether deny them, or maintain opinions inconsistent with a right apprehension of them. By a certain class of interpreters, it is contended that Christ was no more than a Messenger, or Teacher, commissioned simply to announce the Divine mercy in the pardon of sin, and to preach the efficacy of repentance. But if this be the whole of the case, and if in this sense only our Lord is said to mediate between God and man; why is not the same ascribed to Moses and the Prophets, to the Apostles, or to others who were from time to time commissioned to declare God’s will to mankind? Yet St. Paul expressly says, “There is ONE GOD, and ONE MEDIATOR between God and man, the man CHRIST JESUS, who gave himself a ransom for all^m.” Nothing is more evident than that the title of Mediator is here given exclusively to our blessed Saviour; and given him, not merely because he preached salvation, but because he pur-

^m 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6.

chased it for us by his death; because he stood between the offending and the offended parties, and reconciled them to each other; because he removed the enmity between them; bringing us to God, who had departed from him, and rendering God propitious to us for his sake. This, indeed, is clearly implied in the very term *Mediator*, which denotes one who satisfies the offended party by interposing on behalf of the offender. But in what propriety of speech could this be applied to a person who merely delivers a message to that effect? or what could St. Paul intend, when he says of Christ, "He gave his life a ransom for all," but that by virtue of the expiation he had made, and not merely by preaching remission of sins, he became invested with full and effective powers to plead for us at the throne of grace? Every point of view in which the Apostle has placed this consolatory doctrine tends to shew that, "by his own oblation of himself once offered," our Lord had acquired the right to plead for us with the Father, not as a mere suppliant, but as an all-powerful Redeemer; one who, having "bought us with a price," even the price of his own blood, presents to God those who are his, with an entire assurance that the mediation shall not be unavailing.

Full of hope, however, and of comfort, as this doctrine is, there are errors both in faith and practice which, to those who retain them, may defeat its purpose.

There was an ancient heresy in the Church, that denied the hope of salvation to those who had once fallen away from the faith, notwithstanding their subsequent penitence and conversion. This rigorous and unscriptural persuasion has long since passed away. Yet something not altogether dissimilar to it may still be found among those who are prone to despondency themselves, or wanting in charity towards others. The certainty that Christ is "able to save them to the uttermost that "come unto God by him," ought to be a sovereign antidote to any such misgivings or surmises. Despair, it has been truly said, is the worst enemy of the soul. It is the only state of mind for which the Gospel itself affords no remedy. It is madness to entertain it ourselves; it is cruelty to give occasion to it in others. In no case can it be admissible, but in that of absolute impenitency or unbelief. The surest preservative against it is a constant recollection that in God "is plenteous "redemption"," and that He hath said, "Him

¹¹ Psalm cxxx. 7.

“who cometh unto ME I will in no wise cast out°.”

But there is an error of an opposite kind, far more likely to gain proselytes, yet equally militating against a right apprehension of this doctrine. It is the error of those who persuade themselves that God sees no sin in his elect; or, in other words, that God hath so absolutely predestinated certain persons to eternal life, that whatever sins they commit, it is impossible they should finally fall away. This seems to be in effect affirming, either that the sins of such persons are not actually sinful in the sight of God, or that they are already forgiven, even before they are committed; their pardon being, as it were, antedated by a special decree of the Almighty in their favour. It is almost needless to observe, how entirely this notion seems to supersede the necessity of intercession by a mediator, and to regard even the duties of repentance and obedience, if not as absolutely superfluous, yet as matters already provided for in the secret arbitration of the Almighty, and concerning which, therefore, the individual interested need entertain little solicitude.

There are also certain errors fostered by the Romish Church, which are repugnant to this

° John vi. 37.

great article of our faith. The supposed offering of the real body of Christ in the continual sacrifice of the mass, plainly derogates from the infinite value of the *one* oblation of our Saviour on the cross, and implies the insufficiency of that sacrifice without this vain repetition of it. It is virtually recurring to the exploded system of the Jewish ritual ; in which sacrifices were offered continually, because the Redeemer whom they typified had not yet appeared to effect, once for all, the purpose of their institution. But still more does the Church of Rome offend against the doctrine of *one* only sacrifice, and *one* only Mediator and Intercessor, by the introduction of *many* mediators ; by the invocation of saints, and angels, and the Blessed Virgin ; and by the superstitious veneration of images and relics ; greatly to the disparagement of “ His meritorious cross and passion, “ whereby alone we obtain remission of our “ sins, and are made partakers of the kingdom of heaven.” Greatly also is the mediatorial office of our Lord infringed upon by the monstrous fiction of purgatory and the use of masses for the dead ; by which the power of intercession seems, as it were, to be wrested from the hands of Him who alone is “ mighty to save,” and placed at the disposal

of men presumptuously assuming the prerogatives of the Most High.

Against all such errors our Church most carefully guards us, in her Creeds, her Articles, and her Liturgy. She declares, that “the grant of repentance is not to be denied “to such as fall into sin after baptism;”—that “after we have received the Holy Ghost “we may depart from grace given, and fall “into sin, and by the grace of God may arise “again, and amend our lives;”—and that “they are to be condemned which say, they “can no more sin as long as they live here, “or deny the place of forgiveness to such “as truly repent.” She also reprobates the masses of the Romish Church, disclaims the invocation of saints, renounces the notion of purgatory, and offers up her prayers in the name of “Jesus Christ, our *only* Mediator “and Advocate.” Thus she closes up every avenue to mistake on these points, and gives the honour due unto God the Father, without derogating from the infinite value of the mediation and intercession of God the Son.

The practical improvement of this subject no sincere disciple of Christ can be at a loss to make. Our Lord is “gone up on high;” he hath “led captivity captive, and received

“ gifts for men^p,” even the gifts of pardon and sanctification. He hath despoiled death of its sting, and the grave of its victory. He is now “ Head over all things to the Church^q,” which he governs and sanctifies by his constant, though invisible presence. “ He must “ reign till he hath put all enemies under his “ feet.” “ Then cometh the end, when he shall “ have delivered up the kingdom to God, even “ the Father^r.” His mediatorial office, with every thing specially wrought by him for the redemption of mankind, having fully accomplished its purpose, will then necessarily cease. But before that blessed consummation, this same Jesus, who was visibly taken up into heaven, “ will so come in like manner as he “ was seen to go into heaven.” He shall come in power and great glory, to judge both the quick and dead ; and “ the dead, “ small and great, shall stand before God ; “ and the books shall be opened, and the dead “ shall be judged out of those things that are “ written in the books, according to their “ works^s.” That we may at that great and terrible day of the Lord, receive the full benefit of his merits and intercession, let our thoughts, our hearts, and minds, thither now

^p Ephes. iv. 8.

^q Ephes. i. 22.

^r 1 Cor. xv.

24, 25.

^s Rev. xx. 12.

ascend where he is gone before. Be it our unremitting care to “seek those things which “are above, where Christ sitteth at the right “hand of God;” to live like men waiting the coming of our Lord; and so to perfect ourselves in his faith and fear, that “when Christ, “who is our life, shall appear, we also may “appear with him in glory^t.”

^t Coloss. iii. 1, 4.

SERMON XXI.

ACTS ii. 4.

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

IN every miracle proposed to our belief, two points are chiefly requisite; first, that it appears to have been an act which none but Divine power could perform; secondly, that it was wrought for some important purpose, worthy of divine interposition. In both these respects, the miracle recorded in the words of the text will bear the strictest investigation.

That a power, instantaneously communicated, of speaking divers languages, is utterly beyond the reach of human faculties, will hardly even by the most sceptical be called in question. That some who were witnesses of this in the case here related of the Apostles, should have had the hardihood

to “mock” at so astonishing an occurrence, saying, “These men are full of new wine^a,” is a lamentable instance of ignorance, of inconsideration, or of perverseness. It was nothing less than ascribing to the grossest debasement of the understanding that which transcends the powers of the most perfect human intellect. If, indeed, there can be any gradation in miraculous gifts, this was a miracle of the highest order. It carries, on the very face of it, the evidence of such an immediate and overpowering influence upon the mental faculties, as can be conceived to proceed only from Him who first endowed man with the gift of speech. It was an act of direct supernatural agency, as manifest and as complete as it would have been to enable the new-born infant to articulate, or the tongue of the dumb to sing.

That no illusion could have been practised upon this occasion is also equally certain. The simple narrative of the Apostle removes every suspicion of this kind. “There were “dwelling,” says he, “at Jerusalem, Jews, “devout men, out of every nation under “heaven ;” and “when this was noised “abroad, the multitude came together, and “were confounded, because that every man

^a Acts ii. 13.

“heard them speak in his own language.
“And they were all amazed and marvelled,
“saying one to another, Behold, are not all
“these which speak Galileans? And how
“hear we every man in our own tongue,
“wherein we were born?” Here it is evident, that persons wholly unconnected and unacquainted with the Apostles came purposely to satisfy themselves of the truth of what they had heard reported; and since the gift so bestowed, though sudden and instantaneous in its production, was not transient or momentary in its effect, but continued to be a permanent gift throughout the course of their ministry, time and opportunity were not wanting to verify the fact, not only at that moment, but long after the first impressions of surprise and wonder had ceased. The immediate consequence, however, was amply sufficient to set incredulity at defiance. “The
“same day were added” to the number of Christian converts “three thousand souls^b.” What deception can we conceive it possible for the Apostles to have practised upon such an assemblage of persons, strangers to each other, coming from various distant countries, and each, however illiterate or uneducated, conversant at least with his own vernacular

^b Acts ii. 41.

tongue, and in that respect beyond the reach of delusion? Had the Apostles indeed attempted to persuade either themselves or others that they possessed such a gift, when in reality they possessed it not; where would have been the individual among the whole multitude who could not instantly have detected the fraud, and have exposed it to scorn and derision?

On the certainty, then, of the fact itself we may assume there could be no reasonable doubt. Of its importance, as in every respect worthy of Divine interposition, the evidence will be found no less satisfactory.

On the eve of his departure from this world, our Lord fully explained to his sorrowing disciples the expediency of his leaving them to the guidance of that Holy Spirit who was to supply his place here on earth: "If I go not away, the COMFORTER will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send HIM unto you^c." From that Comforter they were to obtain such further instruction and such continual help, as should enable them to discharge the functions of the high and sacred office to which they had been called. While their blessed Master remained on earth, and before he had, by his death, resurrection, and

^c John xvi. 7.

ascension, fulfilled all that the prophets had spoken of him, they were far from distinctly apprehending the entire purpose of his coming, or the true nature of the spiritual kingdom he was about to establish. Their inability to discern these things until after all had been accomplished, is assigned as a reason why they should not repine at the loss of his presence: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shew it unto you^d." Among other extraordinary powers to be conferred upon them, this heavenly Comforter was to "bring all things to their remembrance whatsoever he had said unto them^e;" thus not only supplying his place to the fullest extent of their exigencies, but giving them the most entire assurance, that whatever was imparted by the one would be confirmed and ratified by the other. For these important purposes our Lord stated his departure to be necessary, and the coming of the Holy Ghost indispens-

^d John xvi. 12, 13, 14.^e John xiv. 26.

ably requisite. After his resurrection, he again reminded them of this, by declaring that “not many days” from that time they should be “baptized with the Holy Ghost;” commanding them also “not to depart from “Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of “the Father, which they had heard from “Him;” adding yet further, “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is “come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses “unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth^f.”

Conformably with these instructions, the Apostles, it appears, abode at Jerusalem, awaiting the event foretold, and preparing themselves for it by prayer and supplication, and by daily communications with each other. “And when the day of Pentecost was fully “come, they were all with one accord in one “place. And suddenly there came a sound “from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, “and it filled all the house where they were “sitting. And there appeared unto them “cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat “upon each of them. And they were all “filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to

^f Acts i. 3, 5, 8.

“ speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance^g.”

The expression, “ when the day of Pentecost was fully come,” reminds us of a similar one used by St. Paul respecting our Lord’s coming; “ When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son.” In both instances, it seems to be implied that the event spoken of was to take place at some definite period of time, until which the completion of the purpose of the Almighty would be wanting. The “ fulness of time” in which our Lord appeared, was marked by the accomplishment of many distinct and circumstantial prophecies concerning him, as well as by the general state of the heathen world, and the particular aspect of the Roman and Jewish governments, at that special crisis. The circumstances which render a similar expression applicable to the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, though less obvious to immediate observation, are such as give great additional interest to the event.

The festival of Pentecost was ordained under the Jewish dispensation to commemorate the giving of the Law from mount Sinai, fifty days after the Passover. The solemn

^g Acts ii. 1—4.

promulgation of the Gospel on that day, ushered in by a miracle so stupendous, could hardly fail to excite attention, and to impress strongly upon the mind of a devout observer the seeming coincidence of the two dispensations. The Christian convert, at least, might be led to infer, that as the Jewish passover had prefigured our Lord's death and passion, so the giving of the Law to the Israelites on mount Sinai might be contemplated as typical of the preaching of the Gospel to all nations. St. Luke's expression that the "day was fully come," seems to indicate the expectation that our Lord's promise would come to pass at that particular season.

Other circumstances also might tend to connect these occurrences with each other in contemplative minds. The Divine presence had been manifested on the delivery of the Mosaic Law, by thunders and lightnings and other terrific signs, impressing the people with awe and dread. That same presence was indicated on this occasion, not indeed by tokens so tremendous, but by wonders no less demonstrative of Divine agency, and rendered doubly impressive by being associated with the recollection of what had passed in former times, on the day still held sacred. "The sound as of a rushing mighty wind,"

which “filled all the house where they were sitting,” and the cloven tongues “like as of fire” which sat upon each of the Apostles, would bring to mind the thunders and lightnings of the former period, and would excite scarcely less veneration towards these holy men, than had been felt by the Israelites towards their inspired Lawgiver. These marvellous appearances were also significant of the powerful energy of the Gospel and its preachers, “whose sound was to go out into all lands, and their words unto the end of the world^h.” As the elements of air and fire purify and invigorate, warm and enlighten the natural world; so does the Holy Spirit operate on the hearts and minds of men. Its immediate effect upon the Apostles corresponded with these symbols: and multitudes bore witness to its almost irresistible influence both on those who preached and those who heard the word. Again; the “cloven tongues” betokened that precious gift by which the Apostles discoursed in various languages to people of various nations, on the “wonderful works of God.” This they did “as the Spirit gave them utterance.” By “the word of wisdom” and “the word of

^h Psalm xix. 4.

“knowledge” they were enabled to understand divine truths; and by the gift of “divers kinds of tonguesⁱ,” they were empowered to communicate them to others; not simply to speak and utter them, but to expound, exhort, persuade, and argue, with a power far exceeding any ordinary human endowments.

This miracle, then, is to be considered as a public and solemn manifestation of the coming of the Holy Ghost, to complete the work of our redemption. By indisputable tokens of Divine power, the Almighty had already borne witness to the coming of his Son; and now, by tokens no less convincing, he bore witness to the descent of the Holy Spirit. The festival we this day celebrate^j has hence been sometimes called the Advent, and the Epiphany, of the Holy Ghost; corresponding with the terms applied to the coming of our blessed Saviour. The purposes to be effected by each were indeed inseparably connected. Our Lord came to fulfil the Law, and make atonement for its transgression; the Holy Ghost, to perfect the Gospel, and give spiritual life to its disciples. Christ came to redeem the church; the Holy Ghost to sanctify

ⁱ 1 Cor. xii. 8, 10.

^j Whitsunday.

it. The former announced remission of sins, through faith, repentance, and obedience; the latter disposes and enables the believer to accept these conditions, and to perform them. The full effect of our Lord's coming was not indeed perfectly understood even by his Apostles, until the Spirit "guided them into all truth," enriching them with spiritual knowledge, dissipating their doubts and fears, and fortifying them against all temptations to swerve from their arduous undertaking. Heretofore they had been slow of belief, wavering, irresolute, indisposed, through prejudice or misapprehension, to discern the true nature of our Lord's kingdom, or to receive his doctrines in their full extent. Now, their understandings were enlightened, their hearts invigorated. Zeal, fervour, intrepidity, perseverance, marked their whole character and demeanour, and gave indubitable tokens of that divine impression which alone can be conceived to have wrought a change so sudden, yet so permanent; so competent to the supply of every human infirmity, and to the mastery of every unruly will and affection.

Yet what could even these gifts have availed for performing the task assigned to them, had not others been superadded, to

enable them to discharge that last and most important injunction of their heavenly Master, "Go ye, and teach all nations"^k?" How were they to attempt this, of all undertakings the most hopeless, to men destitute as they were of advantages, as to station in life, education, or influence of any kind, that might hold out to them the remotest prospect of success?

For this purpose, the gift of tongues was the first and perhaps the most necessary of all the supernatural powers conferred upon them. The very gift itself bespoke the intention of the Almighty, "that his way "should be known upon earth, his saving "health among all nations^l." It expressively taught to the Apostles, that the Spirit was to "lead them into all truth," not for themselves only, but for all mankind. It qualified them to become Apostles in the full acceptance of that term; persons sent, or commissioned, to make disciples among all nations, and to constitute a "holy church "throughout all the world." In this sense, they themselves, with the Prophets before them, are truly called the "foundation" on which we are built; "Jesus Christ himself "being the chief corner stone^m."

^k Matth. xxviii. 19.

^l Psalm lxii. 2.

^m Ephes. ii. 20.

Thus endued with power from on high, these holy men went forth, “the Lord working with them, and confirming the word “with signs following.” They spread the knowledge of the Gospel in all directions. Instantaneously they became qualified to open their commission as messengers of the Most High, and to obtain a hearing, at least, of what they were authorized to promulgate. That diversity of languages which originally had been inflicted for the punishment of impiety and presumption, was now by the infinite mercy of God rendered instrumental in bringing back all nations to be “one fold, “under one Shepherd.” When the men of Babel, in just judgment upon their daring confederacy against the Almighty, were divided in their language, there immediately ensued confusion and the utter discomfiture of their vain design. With the Apostles, the diversity of tongues gave occasion to an universal diffusion of the truth, and became a bond of union in the faith, however widely scattered its innumerable disciples. That proved a blessing in the one case, which in the other operated as the bitterest of punishments. So effectually can the same miraculous agency, directed by an all-wise and over-ruling Pro-

ⁿ Mark xvi. 20.

^o John x. 16.

vidence, subserve the purposes either of judgment or of mercy.

Nor is the benefit we ourselves may derive from the contemplation of this stupendous event limited to our admiration of the immediate use of it by the first preachers of Christianity. It teaches us lessons of high importance as to our own faith and practice; such as no distance of time, no disparity of circumstances, can diminish in value.

First, it calls upon us to bless God for the result of this precious gift; since we ourselves, whose forefathers were once among the darkest of the heathen tribes, have thus “been brought out of darkness and error “into the clear light and knowledge of him “and of his Son Jesus Christ.” Under the circumstances of the first preachers of the Gospel, no secondary causes can be conceived adequate to such an effect. Their inability to preach it in different languages would in itself have presented an insuperable obstacle to their success. Could we therefore even suppose, (improbable as the supposition appears to be,) that the Apostles might have had influence enough to persuade their fellow-countrymen to accept their ministry and their message; yet what a length of time must necessarily have elapsed, before these

could have been extended beyond even the confines of Judæa! For every thing exceeding that narrow boundary, the want of this miraculous gift, whatever others they might possess, must have operated as an absolute disqualification.

Secondly, the extraordinary effect of this great miracle, in enabling the Apostles to spread abroad the knowledge of the truth, admonishes us how we, under the ordinary guidance of the same Spirit, may hope to carry on that vast design, until “the earth
“shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord,
“as the waters cover the sea^p.” The gift of tongues, though evidently miraculous with respect to these its first preachers, is yet attainable in a considerable degree by human labour and perseverance; and since it is now no longer supernaturally imparted, it must be supplied by proficiency in human learning. The fact that the Apostles presumed not to go forth on their widely extended commission until thus transcendently endowed, may teach us that this is a work not rashly to be undertaken by unqualified and illiterate men. In vain will it be pleaded that the Apostles were fishermen, tent-makers, or publicans, persons of no superior mental qualifications,

^p Isa. xi. 9.

no superior advantages of education. The extraordinary gifts bestowed upon them supplied the want of these, far beyond the highest human acquirements. To neglect such acquirements, therefore, as not requisite to the work of the ministry, is rashness and presumption, wholly unwarranted by the example of the Apostles. They not only prayed, but laboured for their own improvement, and for that of others. They conferred one with another; they met together in council; they thought and deliberated before they acted; they reasoned with those whom they sought to convert; nor did they presume even on the help of the Holy Spirit, without diligent application on their own part. They did not arrogantly “tempt God,” by expecting his inspirations and suggestions, to uphold them in rash and ill-advised undertakings.

Another point suggested by the miracle of the gift of tongues, is the duty of translating the holy Scriptures into divers languages, so that all may benefit by that light which was to “light every man that cometh into the “world^q.” This important work of Christian charity, when faithfully executed, can hardly fail to become a powerful instrument of conversion. But it is an instrument only, and

^q John i. 9.

not designed to work its own effect, unaccompanied with other aid. It does not supersede the ministry ; although it is its great and all-powerful engine, its most effectual means of impressing the truth upon the hearts and minds of men. We read not, however, of any conversions wrought by the Apostles or their immediate successors, merely by sending abroad the sacred word. They laboured personally themselves ; expounding what was written, and reasoning out of the Scriptures. They “reproved, rebuked, exhorted^r.” Yet all was done “decently and in order^s.” No one “stretched beyond his own measure^t ;” each had his stated province and commission. Thus have they left a model, to all succeeding ages of the Church, of sober judgment and sound discretion ; of zeal tempered with knowledge ; of simplicity guided by wisdom ; of charity not degenerating into weak connivance at error, nor giving countenance to disorder and irregularity. Well it becomes us not to depart from these salutary rules ; nor to admit any fervours of enthusiasm or any pretences of a private spirit to interfere with their observance. To the Apostles only was the promise given that the Holy Spirit should

^r 2 Tim. iv. 2.^s 1 Cor. xiv. 40.^t 2 Cor. x. 14.

guide them into "all truth." The substance of that truth we have in *their* writings; to explain and to enforce which, are the prime objects of the now existing ministry. Through them, and not by any immediate communications from above, must the Christian teacher now instruct others; and thus must all the faithful now "try the spirits, whether they " be of God ^v."

Little, however, will all these benefits avail, unless we bear in mind, both teachers and hearers, that our own personal advancement in every Christian grace and virtue is the main purpose to be effected. God, who at first "taught the hearts of his faithful people " by sending to them the light of his Holy " Spirit," willed also that "by the same Spirit " we should have a right judgment in all " things, and evermore rejoice in his holy " comfort." The promise of *this* aid was not to the Apostles only, but "to as many as the " Lord our God should call ^w" to the knowledge of the truth. In this respect "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every " man to profit withal ^x." For, whether there " be tongues, they shall cease; whether there " be knowledge, it shall vanish away ^y." But

^v 1 John iv. 1.

^w Acts ii. 39.

^x 1 Cor. xii. 7.

^y 1 Cor. xiii. 8.

“the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance^z.” These belong to the faithful in all generations, and in the fullest sense shall “abide with them for ever.” For these let us implore the grace of God to assist our own weak endeavours, and draw near to him in those “holy mysteries” which he hath ordained as “pledges of his love, to our great and endless comfort.” At his holy altar let us “lift up our hearts unto the Lord,” and “give thanks unto our Lord God,” as “it is meet and right to do;” that so we may be “filled with all joy and peace in believing, and may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost^a.”

^z Gal. v. 22, 23.

^a Rom. xv. 13.

SERMON XXII.

2 PETER iii. 18.

Grow in grace.

AMONG the subjects which have given rise to a great variety of controversies in the Christian church, are those which relate to our sanctification by the Holy Spirit; that grace of God, which the Scriptures represent as indispensably necessary to enable us to work out our salvation. Few professed Christians, if any, totally deny the necessity of this aid. Many lower its importance, by overrating the natural powers of man in his present state; and some virtually renounce it, by rejecting the divinity and personality of the Holy Ghost. Yet even these do not, in general, deny that some divine help may be requisite, or that it is actually bestowed; though great diversities of opinion are entertained as to the extent of its influence on

the human mind, and its compatibility with the exercise of those inherent faculties, which are common to all mankind.

The difficulties relating to this doctrine might perhaps have been less vehemently agitated, had its advocates been always content to adhere to the plain declarations of Scripture. When attempts are made to philosophize upon such a subject, numerous topics will present themselves on which no certain information may be attainable. To reconcile the Divine operation with man's free agency, to explain how that which is divine can be otherwise than irresistible, or that which is human can render ineffectual that which proceeds from an omnipotent power, are perplexities which probably our finite intellects are not competent to unravel. But our inability to remove these in no wise affects the truth or certainty of the doctrine itself. Although we know not how spirit acts either upon matter or mind; or how impressions can be made upon our faculties, without a consciousness on our part whence they proceed; yet the impossibility or the incredibility of the thing cannot thence be reasonably inferred. It is enough to reason from the Psalmist's analogy, "He that made the eye, shall he not see? And he that made

“ the ear, shall he not hear^a?” He that formed the understanding and the will of man, shall He not be able to impress upon both, or either, (even without our perception of the agency,) wisdom, discernment, and strength? Our consciousness of the communication may be no more necessary to the production of the effect, than a metaphysical knowledge of the mind, or a physiological knowledge of the body, is requisite to our exercise of the intellectual or animal functions. The effect may ensue, we know not how: and if God in his own word affirm that it ensues by HIS agency, who shall prove the negative?

But these are not inquiries which it is my present intention to pursue. The Apostle's exhortation in the text suggests a more simple and a more practical view of the subject. It is restricted to one main consideration, our *growth in grace*; that our attainments in holiness, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, are *gradual* and *progressive*; a subject well adapted to give us sober and rational conceptions of this essential article of our faith; capable also of being established by the clearest Scripture-proofs, and applied as a preservative against some dangerous errors and delusions.

^a Psalm cxiv. 9.

“The path of the just,” says Solomon, “is
“as the shining light, that shineth more and
“more unto the perfect day^b.” This corre-
sponds, not only with St. Peter’s injunction
in the text, but with his representation of the
Christian character as combining an assem-
blage of excellent qualities, the result of ha-
bitual practice:—“giving all diligence, add
“to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, know-
“ledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and
“to temperance, patience; and to patience,
“godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kind-
“ness; and to brotherly kindness, charity.
“For if these things be in you, and abound,
“they make you that ye shall neither be
“barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of
“our Lord Jesus Christ^c.” St. Paul’s in-
structions are to the same effect:—“Finally,
“brethren, whatsoever things are true, what-
“soever things are honest, whatsoever things
“are just, whatsoever things are pure, what-
“soever things are lovely, whatsoever things
“are of good report; if there be any virtue,
“and if there be any praise, think on these
“things^d.” Nor did St. Paul consider him-
self, even at a very advanced period of his
ministry, as having yet attained to Christian
perfection; but “forgetting those things which

^b Prov. iv. 18.^c 2 Pet. i. 5—8.^d Phil. iv. 8.

“ were behind, and reaching forth unto those
 “ which were before,” he “ pressed towards
 “ the mark for the prize of the high calling
 “ of God in Christ Jesus^e.” He exhorts also
 the Corinthians “ so to run that they might
 “ obtain^f,” and he prays for the Philippians,
 “ that their love might abound yet more and
 “ more in knowledge and in all judgment ;
 “ that they might approve things that are ex-
 “ cellent ; that they might be sincere and
 “ without offence till the day of Christ ; being
 “ filled with the fruits of righteousness, which
 “ are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and
 “ praise of God^g.”

These authorities sufficiently prove that
 our sanctification, though the work of the
 Holy Spirit, is the gradual result of habitual
 exercise in what is good. They prove also,
 that the degree of perfection at which we
 may arrive has no definite limits, but is to go
 on increasing as long as this state of proba-
 tion continues. It is true, that even with
 this promised aid no one may hope to attain
 an absolute freedom from sin. “ In many
 “ things we offend all.” Yet this unavoidable
 imperfection is not incompatible with our
 continuance in a state of grace. The sure
 test of our being in that state is an habitual

^e Phil. iii. 13, 14. ^f 1 Cor. ix. 24. ^g Phil. i. 9—11.

desire and endeavour to perform the Divine will. And though, as our Church expresses it, “the infection of our nature doth remain, “yea, in them that are regenerated;” so that even our best works require a more perfect righteousness than our own to render them available in the sight of God; yet may our growth in grace be nevertheless sufficiently evidenced. Our faith, our repentance, our humility, our daily efforts to “improve in all “virtue and godliness of living,” may give a well-grounded assurance that we are going on from strength to strength, and advancing in the way to eternal life. This was the extent of St. Paul’s assertion, that he could “do “all things through Christ, that strengthened “him^h;” and of St. John’s, that “whosoever “is born of God doth not commit sin, for his “seed remaineth in him, and he cannot commit sin, because he is born of Godⁱ.” Such expressions, in whatever stage of advancement in holiness, can denote no more than that devotedness of heart and will to the service of God, which habitually shrinks from sin and abhors the very thought of deliberately offending God. For even among the most blameless of men the corruption of our nature will still betray its malignant influence.

^h Phil. iv. 13.

ⁱ 1 John iii. 9.

St. Paul affirms, even of those who “walk in
“the spirit,” that “the flesh lusteth against
“the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh;
“and that these are contrary the one to the
“other, so that they cannot do the things
“that they would^k.” And St. John admon-
ishes us that, “if we say we have no sin, we
“deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in
“us^l.”

Our estimate, therefore, of men’s proficiency
in holiness is not reducible to any specific
standard, applicable alike to all persons and
under all circumstances and conditions of life.
So variable are the temperaments and dis-
positions of men, so manifold their trials and
temptations, that none but the omniscient
Judge can determine what measure of grace
is needful for each individual, what degree of
either extenuation or aggravation may be as-
cribed to each individual’s delinquency, or
what exercise of faith and constancy may have
been called forth in every given instance of ex-
emplary conduct. We are nevertheless assur-
ed that, according to the most perfect equity
will every man’s final award be adjudged.
God “will be justified in his saying, and clear
“when he is judged^m.” “Unto whomsoever
“much is given, of him shall much be re-

^k Gal. v. 17.

^l 1 John i. 8.

^m Psalm li. 4.

“quired”.” “He that soweth sparingly shall
“reap sparingly; and he that soweth boun-
“tifully shall reap also bountifully°.” The
punishment of the unprofitable servant in the
parable, indicates that the smallest portion of
grace may be sufficient to enable him who is
in covenant with God to work out his sal-
vation; while the respective rewards assigned
to those who had well occupied their five and
their ten talents, imply that when ampler
supplies are vouchsafed so much weightier
responsibility is incurred. One simple rule,
therefore, is to govern alike, in this respect,
the conduct of every Christian believer; what-
ever God hath enabled him to do, that he is
bound to do, be it more or less. He is not
to propose to himself certain scanty measures
of duty, which if he performs he shall be
harmless; still less may he presume to ima-
gine that he is capable of performing, in any
proper sense of the word, works of superero-
gation. When he has done all that was in
his power, he has done only what it was his
duty to do: when he has done less than that,
he has fallen short of the measure required.
His highest attainments are from the ability
that God giveth; his lowliest proceed from
the same source, and lay him under the same

ⁿ Luke xii. 48.

^o 2 Cor. ix. 6.

obligations to Him who imparts what is needful for the purpose, and will exact the proportionate improvement. Supineness on the one hand, and self-sufficiency on the other, stand equally opposed to this unerring rule.

Upon these plain and obvious truths may be engrafted some useful suggestions both as to our faith and practice.

The doctrine, as deduced from Scripture, that our sanctification is a progressive work, seems almost necessarily to imply that it commences with our Christian life. The injunction to grow in grace presupposes that there is a spiritual principle already implanted within us; and this injunction being addressed to Christians in general, without exceptions of any kind, it is to be presumed that all who have been admitted into the Christian covenant had this principle actually bestowed upon them, immediately upon their entrance into that covenant, or, in other words, at the instant of their baptism. This is that regeneration, or new birth, spoken of in Scripture as the common privilege of every Christian. It were in vain to exhort individuals to grow or improve in their spiritual state, unless there were this vital spark within them ready to put forth its energies. Our Church, accordingly, invariably connects baptism with

regeneration ; considering every member of the Church, whether adult or infant, as thereby made partaker of all the spiritual benefits of the Gospel, according to their respective capacities of receiving them ; and thenceforth assured of sufficient help and strength to fulfil the engagements he has covenanted to perform. The terms, “laver of regeneration,” and a “new birth unto righteousness,” used as synonymous with baptism, are fully significant of these benefits.

But in ascribing this effect to baptism, we do not infer, (as some unwarrantably charge upon us,) that this ordinance necessarily works the final salvation of those who receive it. It is not to be imagined that baptism will be available to this end, where it is neither preceded nor followed by the dispositions requisite to ensure its effect. The injunction to “grow in grace” warns us, that the help bestowed must be faithfully and diligently applied to the purpose intended. The seed sown in the heart by our heavenly Benefactor must be duly cultivated and cherished ; the vital spark must not be quenched by carelessness or neglect. Baptism places us in a state of salvation, but does not perfect us in that state, nor preclude the possibility of apostasy and perdition. The term *regeneration* de-

notes no more than the commencement of our spiritual life. Its subsequent support, its growth and increase, its renewal when decayed, its recovery when diseased, are provided for by other means. Further supplies for those purposes, and further means of obtaining them, are pointed out in holy writ. Diligent prayer, meditation on God's word, the observance of his sabbaths, attendance on his ordinances, and especially on that high and holy office, the communion of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper, are among the duties enjoined for carrying on the faithful Christian to that entire sanctification which is necessary to give him a joyful assurance that he continues to be vitally and effectually "a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven."

From all these considerations, it is evident that our growth in grace, though it originates and is carried on by the Comforter from above, depends in no inconsiderable degree upon ourselves. Exhortations to further its growth would otherwise be nugatory. Nor is this irreconcilable with the most unreserved acknowledgment of our dependence upon God for the ability "both to will and "to do of his good pleasure^p." Our "suffi-

“ciency is of God^q.” It is from Him that “all good things do come.” It is by His holy inspiration that we “think those things that be good;” and by His merciful guidance that we “perform the same.” His grace is necessary to “prevent us in all our doings,” as well as to “further us with continual help.” But in every stage of life, from the beginning to the end of our Christian warfare, our own perverseness or neglect may render that of none effect which otherwise would be sufficient. Throughout the holy scriptures, men are invariably addressed by the inspired messengers of God, as capable of improving or abusing the divine gift bestowed upon them; yet this does not derogate from the value of the gift itself, nor ascribe to human ability what ought to be acknowledged as divine. Growth in grace, like the growth of our natural frame, results from due care and attention on our part; nor may we expect the continuance of either from God, if such diligence be wanting in ourselves. “Unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath^r.” Not only no proficiency can be made in our spiritual concerns without our own cooperation, but the grace already given us may be withdrawn.

^q 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^r Matt. xxv. 29.

Regeneration, therefore, must not be confounded with final perseverance. It is the seminal principle only of holiness and virtue, which are to be brought to perfection by subsequent supplies from the same heavenly source, accompanied with proportionate exertions on our part to render them effectual.

The foregoing observations may now be applied as a preservative against some dangerous errors and delusions, and serve to uphold the humble and unpresuming Christian in his endeavours to “make his calling and “election sure.”

It is a dangerous error, to imagine that to any individual Christian there is not given a *sufficiency* of grace to “work out his salvation.” To suppose this, is virtually to charge God with requiring from man more than he is enabled to perform. To every one admitted into the Gospel covenant, the promises of that covenant are pledged and ratified by “Him with whom is no variableness or shadow of turning^s ;” nor can they fail when accepted by a faithful and willing mind.

It is a no less dangerous error, to suppose that the grace so given, though sufficient, will *necessarily* produce the effect intended.

^s James i. 17.

In other cases, as well as in this, what is sufficient for any given purpose, may be rendered insufficient by neglect, perversion, or misapplication. A man may have enough of this world's possessions to answer every good and useful purpose of life, and yet apply it to no good or useful end. He may have the best natural endowments of understanding, and yet miserably pervert them. He may bury his talent in a napkin, or he may waste it in profligacy. He may consume his bodily strength in sensual indulgence, or his mental acquirements in promoting impiety and vice. In like manner, abundant means may be afforded him of spiritual advancement, yet may he turn them to no good account. However highly, therefore, we may be disposed to magnify the sovereignty and the all-sufficiency of the Source from which these blessings flow, we must bear in mind the evident analogy, in this respect, between the gifts of Providence and those of Grace; that neither the one nor the other are intended to operate to the exclusion of that free agency, by which we are to choose between the evil and the good, and are made morally responsible for our choice.

It is also a dangerous error, to conceive that at any period of life, or under any cir-

cumstances of apparent proficiency in spiritual attainments, we may presume upon an *absolute assurance* of obtaining the prize of the high calling that is set before us. The further we have advanced in our Christian course, the greater probability there may be of our persevering to the end, and the more inexcusable shall we be if we eventually fail. But the awful warning of St. Peter may well guard us against any implicit reliance upon such a presumptuous expectation, when, speaking even of those who had already made considerable advancement in Christian graces, he says, “it were better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them¹.”

It is yet another dangerous error, (perhaps, the most dangerous of all,) to presume upon any evidence of our being “led by the Spirit of God,” unaccompanied with a correspondent *practical effect* upon our hearts and lives. When St. Paul says, “the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God²,” his meaning is explained by what immediately precedes the observation; “if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye, through the Spirit, do mor-

¹ 2 Pet. ii. 21.

² Rom. viii. 16.

“tify the deeds of the body, ye shall live^x.” To the consciousness of leading a life conformable to this principle of holiness and virtue the Apostle here refers, as the inward testimony on which we may rely; not to enthusiastic imaginations, or those miscalled experiences, which some are wont to insist upon as infallible proofs of their being in a state of grace.

Against all these errors, the admonition in the text affords the surest preservative. It implies, that to every member of Christ’s body God’s grace will be sufficient, if duly sought for and applied;—that if it fail of effect, its failure will be attributable to ourselves; that the completion of its purpose cannot take place till life itself is ended; and that by its fruits only, its efficacious influence upon our faith and practice, can it be known that we really have this gift of God abiding in us, or may entertain any reasonable expectation of our final acceptance.

Are we solicitous, then, to be assured that we have not received the grace of God in vain?—let us not trust to any fallacious tests of our own devising, but impartially examine our thoughts, words, and actions, by the unerring standard of God’s word. That word

^x Rom. viii. 15.

being itself the blessed work of the Holy Spirit, nothing repugnant to it can proceed from the same Spirit. In that, as in a mirror, we may see what we really are, and may judge of ourselves by its faithful representations. It will shew us, without flattery, what faults we have to amend: it will encourage us, “whereto we have already attained,” to “walk by the same rule^y.” But in looking into it for these salutary purposes, we must adhere to St. James’s golden rule, “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass, for he beholdeth himself and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed^z.” By this law we are to judge ourselves *now*, because we shall be judged by it *hereafter*. “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God^a.”

^y Phil. iii. 16.

^z James i. 22—25.

^a Gal. vi. 16.

SERMON XXIII.

REVELATIONS iv. 8.

And they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

ON the first reading of this sublime passage of Holy Writ, our thoughts are immediately directed to that great mysterious article of our faith, which the service of this day presents to our contemplation^a. The vision, of which it forms a part, bears a striking resemblance to one that was vouchsafed to the Prophet Isaiah, on first receiving his call to the prophetic office. The Prophet “saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high
“and lifted up; and his train filled the
“temple. Above it stood the seraphims:
“each one had six wings; with twain he
“covered his face, and with twain he covered
“his feet, and with twain he did fly. And

^a Trinity Sunday.

“one cried to another, and said, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory^b.” In these prophetic symbols, which are more diffusively represented in St. John’s vision, are signified the profound reverence, humility, and promptitude, with which the heavenly host surround the throne of the Most High, ever ready to obey his commands: and the alternate hymns, or responses, in which they thrice address the Almighty under the denomination of HOLY, may be regarded not only as marking the intensity of their devotion, but also as having reference to the three distinct persons in the Godhead, whose unity is at the same time implied in the one common appellation ascribed to them, “the Lord of hosts, the God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.”

That we are warranted in thus interpreting the visions both of the Prophet and the Evangelist, may be inferred from the application made of Isaiah’s vision by St. John himself, and by St. Paul. St. John applies it to our blessed Saviour:—“These things said Esaias, when he saw HIS glory, and spake of HIM^c ;” meaning CHRIST, to whose miracles he had just adverted. St. Paul, citing

^b Isaiah vi. 1, 2, 3.

^c John xii. 41.

the same passage, in his address to the Jews at Rome, says, "Well spake the HOLY GHOST "by Esaias the Prophet unto our fathers^d;" identifying the "LORD OF HOSTS" with the third Person in the blessed Trinity, in the same manner as St. John had identified him with the second Person. Thus each inspired commentator respectively ascribes to the Son and to the Holy Ghost the most exalted expressions of absolute Divinity that are to be found in the sacred writings.

Upon this implied recognition of the doctrine we might venture to ground an argument in favour of that worship of the Holy Trinity, which has ever been maintained in the Christian church. That which is the object of adoration, of faith, and of obedience in heaven, cannot but be the proper object of the same on earth. That which is the theme of praise with saints and angels, must be assuredly the fit subject of our devotions. If glory is given to the tri-une Deity, the three Holy Ones, by the heavenly choir and by the elders of the church, standing before the throne of God; then have we the highest of all authority for that catholic form of worship, introduced from the earliest ages into the primitive Liturgies of the church, and

^d Acts xxviii. 25.

continued to the present day;—"We praise
" thee, O God ; we acknowledge thee to be
" the Lord. All the earth doth worship thee,
" the Father everlasting. To thee all Angels
" cry aloud, the Heavens, and all the Powers
" therein. To thee, Cherubim and Seraphim
" continually do cry, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord
" God of Sabaoth ; heaven and earth are full
" of the majesty of thy glory. The glorious
" company of the Apostles praise thee : the
" goodly fellowship of the Prophets praise
" thee : the holy Church throughout all the
" world doth acknowledge thee ; the Father
" of an infinite Majesty ; thine honourable,
" true, and only Son ; also the Holy Ghost,
" the Comforter."

Our belief, however, of this fundamental article of the Christian faith is not dependent upon presumptive evidence of this description. It is founded upon more direct and positive testimony of holy writ, and further corroborated by a prodigious mass of historical evidence, hardly possible to be accounted for upon any other supposition than the divine authority of the doctrine itself.

St. John opens his Gospel with this unambiguous declaration of our Lord's divinity:—"In the beginning was the WORD, and the
" WORD was with GOD, and the WORD was

“GOD^e.” In the Epistle to the Hebrews St. Paul affirms the Son of God to be “the brightness of HIS glory, and the express image of HIS person^f.” The same Apostle asserts, “that by HIM do all things consist^g;” that “in HIM dwelleth all the fulness of the God-head bodily^h,” that he is “over all,” and “God blessed for everⁱ.” Our Saviour himself assumed titles which led the Jews to charge him with blasphemy in “making himself equal with God^k,” but which nevertheless he continually re-asserted, and wrought miracles to confirm his pretensions to them. He moreover allowed expressions of divine worship to be addressed to him, and assumed to himself the attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence.

The divinity of the Holy Spirit is so unequivocally set forth, that they who controvert it are driven to the necessity of altogether denying his distinct personality, and referring what is said of HIM to the FATHER only. Therefore, if the personality of the Holy Ghost be proved, his divinity, even by the confessions of our adversaries, is proved also. But the expressions used by our Lord himself in speaking of the Holy Ghost, deno-

^e John i. 1.

^f Hebr. i. 3.

^g Col. i. 17.

^h Col. ii. 9.

ⁱ Rom. ix. 5.

^k John v. 18.

minating him the Comforter, and describing him as proceeding from the Father and the Son, and sent for the special purpose of succeeding the Son in the great work of man's redemption, are such as it seems impossible, without perverting the simplest modes of speech, to understand in any other sense than that of a Person distinct from both, though united with them in the same divine nature.

Certain texts of Scripture represent also the joint operation of the three Persons, in terms of the most perfect equality. Such is the form of baptism, and the benediction which concludes St. Paul's second Epistle to the Corinthians; besides other passages in the writings of the New Testament, which though less directly affirmative of the doctrine, will hardly admit of any other clear and consistent interpretation.

But, without dwelling more particularly on these main evidences deduced from holy writ, my chief purpose in the present discourse is, to consider the subject in an historical point of view, connecting it not only with the dispensations of revealed religion antecedent to Christianity, but also, through them, with the theology of the Gentile world.

The faith of the ancient Jewish church has been deemed by many eminent expositors,

to afford no inconsiderable confirmation of this doctrine. Viewing, indeed, the Jewish and Christian scriptures as proceeding from one and the same source of Divine authority, some such indications of accordance between them might be deemed no improbable expectation. The GOD whom Christians worship is the same whom the Jews acknowledged. The MESSIAH, the Word, whom we receive, is the same that was foretold by their prophets. The HOLY SPIRIT whom we believe in, is no other than he who spake by their inspired teachers. Our Lord and his Apostles pressed these considerations upon the Jews themselves. Passages are cited by them from the Old Testament, in which the incommunicable name Jehovah, and the Divine attributes and perfections inseparable from the true God, are ascribed both to the Son and the Holy Ghost ; and the obvious inference to be drawn from these is, that neither the divinity of our Lord, nor that of the Holy Spirit, was a doctrine at variance with what the Law and the Prophets had revealed.

Christian writers of a later period have brought evidence to shew that certain ancient Jewish expositors, even before the coming of Christ, had inferred from the prophetic tokens of the Messiah, that he was to be

a divine person; and that they entertained a belief that the Holy Spirit also was a person of the Godhead. However indistinct these persuasions may have been, and however opposite to those of modern Jews, they bear intrinsic marks of probability; a probability, much strengthened by the occasional appeals of our Lord and his Apostles to those very scriptures on which the faith of the Jews was founded.

But it is further remarkable, that vestiges of this doctrine may be traced, still more remotely, to the patriarchal ages. In the books of Genesis and of Job, the peculiarity occurs of uniting the plural *Elohim* with the singular *Jehovah* and with verbs in the singular number, to denote the Godhead. The title *Jehovah* is applied also in these writings, as in those of later times, sometimes to the *Spirit* of God, sometimes to the *Angel* or *Messenger* of the Lord;—circumstances evidently tending to identify the great Christian doctrine on this subject with that of the earliest revelations of sacred truth.

Additional weight is given to these conjectures, by the scattered remnants of Pagan theology. These might, perhaps, have been derived from personal intercourse with the Jews, or from an imperfect acquaintance with

their sacred records. The fact is indisputable, that notions somewhat resembling the mystery of the Trinity prevailed throughout Asia, Greece, and Rome; and that the theology even of the Hindoos, Persians, and Egyptians supplies much interesting evidence to the same effect. The primary source of these opinions can hardly be doubted. It is acknowledged by some of their most distinguished writers, that theirs was, in many respects, a theology of divine tradition, not of their own invention. Whence, then, could it be, but directly from the Hebrews, or from other nations through them, or from still earlier communications transmitted, through various unknown channels, from the patriarchs themselves, and spread by their descendants through countries the most remote? This alone, perhaps, can satisfactorily account for both the similarity and the dissimilarity between the heathen notions on this subject and the pure doctrine of Revelation. The similarity attests their origin; the dissimilarity, their corruption.

On such a view of the subject, a ready answer is afforded to an objection sometimes confidently advanced against this main article of our faith, that it is comparatively a novel doctrine, an invention even later than

Christianity itself, the offspring of Platonic philosophy. Not to insist upon the extreme improbability, that such a doctrine, or any thing nearly resembling it, should at any period have been the result of human invention, we have, if the foregoing observations are entitled to credit, abundant proof of its far higher antiquity. We have the strongest ground for affirming, that the heathen were in possession of something similar to this doctrine, in times and in places the most remote from those in which Christianity was promulgated; and we may observe, with an eminently learned writer of our own times¹, “the wonderful providence of Almighty God, “that the doctrine should find such admittance in the Pagan world, and be received by the wisest of all their philosophers, before the times of Christianity; “thereby to prepare a more easy way for “the reception of Christianity amongst the “learned Pagans.”

But it is not only in a retrospective view of the extensive prevalence of this doctrine, that we find so much to strengthen our confidence in its divine origin. Its subsequent continuance and almost universal acceptance in every age and in every country where the

¹ Whitaker's Origin of Arianism.

Christian faith has taken root, may well be deemed a concurrent evidence almost equally irrefragable. For, though the doctrine has been for ages past, and still is assailed by numerous adversaries, yet have their efforts to overthrow it hitherto but served to call forth more unanswerable proofs of its divine authority, and to increase the firmness and perseverance of the Church in maintaining it inviolate. When we reflect also, that this has been the case, notwithstanding the boasted pretensions of modern times to superiority of information, and great advancement of intellectual cultivation, together with the increased efforts of the scoffer and the scorner to bring it into discredit; we can hardly but feel confident that the doctrine itself is indeed founded upon a rock, and will abide to the end of time.

Combine now these scattered evidences, and view their collective strength. St. John's vision in the Apocalypse, compared with that of the Prophet Isaiah, and illustrated both by St. John's and St. Paul's application of the Prophet's vision to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, leads us to contemplate the worship of the Holy Trinity as authorized by the example of the blessed in heaven, whether angels and archangels, or "the spirits of just

“men made perfect^m.” Other passages of Scripture more directly affirm the divinity of both these Persons, their union with the Father, and their co-operation with Him in the work of our salvation. The Jewish scriptures contain in substance, and by just inference from their declarations, the same doctrine. Similar results are deducible from the still earlier records of patriarchal times. Throughout the heathen world, traces are to be found of opinions bearing such a degree of resemblance to this doctrine as to indicate one common origin, however obscured and defaced. The doctrine, moreover, still prominently stands forth as the leading article of the Christian faith, still exists and flourishes, has never suffered even a temporary extinction or suspension, has survived attacks innumerable, goes on from generation to generation unimpaired, and, as far as any insight into futurity can be given, holds out the assurance of its unchangeable and perpetual duration. When did such an unbroken chain of evidence as this ever present itself in support of falsehood or delusion?

On the other hand, what are the grounds on which we are called upon to renounce this faith?

^m Heb. xii. 23.

Sometimes the doctrine is set at nought, because it is a *mystery*; and it has been said, where mystery begins, religion ends. No sophism can be more destitute of foundation. Religion begins with mystery, nor is it possible that mystery should be excluded from it. The Divine nature is, and cannot but be to us, a mystery. Our own nature, compounded as it is of spiritual and corporeal faculties, is also a mystery. The whole course of nature is a mystery. So is the divine government of the world, baffling continually the profoundest calculations of human wisdom. Shall we, then, wonder, if the mode of being peculiar to the “God invisible and immortal” be beyond the grasp of our apprehension? Shall we expect that while we are in this earthly tabernacle, such a subject may be brought down to the level of our capacities; and that though in almost every thing else we “see through a glass darkly,” we should be permitted to see “face to face” the glories of the Almighty, and to “know Him even as we are known?” Surely this is to forget the distance between things finite and infinite, between heaven and earth, between matter and spirit, between things temporal and things eternal.

But again it is urged, that a mystery when

revealed, should cease to be a mystery; otherwise, it is in effect, no revelation. This also is a mere strife of words. A mystery is any thing hidden from human observation, any thing imperceptible to human faculties, any thing unattainable by human research. Whatever relates to the essence of the Divine nature is of this description. But though the subject of the thing revealed be mysterious, the evidence by which it is made known may be such as to command our assent: and though the mystery revealed be still a mystery, it may be received without any impeachment of our understandings. To a man born blind, every thing to him invisible is a mystery. But does he act contrary to reason in trusting to the testimony of others, respecting objects which he cannot himself discern? Though unable to walk “by sight,” may he not walk “by faith?” And why may not we do the same with respect to things indiscernible or incomprehensible by our natural faculties? Faith in God is our proper guide in the one case, as faith in man is in the other. In both, though the subject be hidden from our view, enough may be known to certify every reasonable inquirer of its reality and its truth.

But, continues the objector, the doctrine is

contradictory in itself, involving propositions destructive of each other, and which, therefore, reason cannot but reject. Here again we have to complain of disingenuous misrepresentation. It is assumed that what we affirm of the distinct personality in the Godhead, we affirm also of its indivisible substance; a view of the doctrine, not only virtually, but expressly, disclaimed in that very creed which our adversaries most vehemently assail. The Trinitarian believes the Godhead to be capable of distinction in one respect, though incapable of it in another; “neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the substance.” In this consists the essential peculiarity of the doctrine: and whatever difficulty it may present to our apprehensions, it involves no contradiction in terms. Any further insight into the doctrine will be sought in vain. We profess no more than to receive it as revealed in Scripture; and we rely on the authority that reveals it, for our assurance that no doctrine issuing from that authority can be chargeable with any thing inconsistent in itself, or repugnant to its own declarations.

It is contended, however, that this doctrine is absolutely irreconcilable with what is declared in Scripture itself, respecting the unity

of the Divine nature and the supremacy of God the Father. To obviate this objection has been the labour of the most distinguished advocates of the catholic faith, in all ages of the church; and the result, we may venture to assert, has proved, to modest and candid inquirers, entirely satisfactory. By disclaiming all division of the substance of the Godhead, we guard against a violation of its unity; whilst we nevertheless adhere to those representations of holy writ which ascribe to each Person distinct offices and operations in the great work of man's salvation, though united by indissoluble co-existence and perfect identity of nature. In like manner, with respect to the supremacy of God the Father, the catholic faith stands clear of any violation of Scripture truth. The texts which seem to imply our Lord's inferiority to the Father are most simply and satisfactorily explained, by referring them either to his human nature, or to the special office he vouchsafed to undertake, and voluntarily assumed, that of our Mediator and Redeemer. He was "perfect God, and perfect man; equal
" to the Father as touching his Godhead, inferior to the Father as touching his manhood." This is the master-key to the whole mystery of his incarnation. Or, if there be

any passages not clearly explicable on this ground, they may yet be solved by referring them, not to any difference or inequality of nature, but merely to that mode or order of existence, by which it is impossible that either the Son or the Holy Ghost should subsist, but as partaking eternally and indivisibly of the substance of the FATHER.

Thus soberly and guardedly has the Christian church, from the beginning to the present time, sought to establish this fundamental article of faith upon the sure and solid basis of Scripture-authority; never shrinking from the difficulties it involves; never “deceit-fully handling” the word of God, either to remove those difficulties or to conceal them; but undisguisedly laying down the doctrine as it there presents itself; and leaving it to the unsophisticated minds of men to receive it, not as a disputable position of human reasoning, but as a truth which claims admission solely on the ground of deference to divine communication. Nor is it to be regarded as merely a speculative truth. Its practical importance is manifest. It is interwoven in every act of worship we perform, in every part of the stupendous plan of our redemption, in the terms of our acceptance with God, in every benefit we derive from the

Gospel dispensation. Who is our Creator? Who our Redeemer? Who our Sanctifier? And what duties do we owe to each? These are questions to which no Christian can be supposed indifferent. They relate to the Persons whom we are bound to worship, to pray to, to trust in, to love, honour, and obey, in sincerity and truth. At our baptism we commenced our allegiance to each. To each we give glory in our daily acts of praise and thanksgiving. We supplicate each to "have mercy upon us." In the name of each we receive absolution and benediction. We acknowledge each to be "Holy:" and in confessing them jointly to be "The " Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and " is to come," we recognise every blessing, past, present, and future, as resulting from their united operation.

Holy, Holy, Holy, then is each Person of the Godhead—Holy in creation, in redemption, in sanctification—Holy in mercy and in justice—Holy in power, wisdom, and goodness—Holy Father, Holy Son, Holy Spirit.

Now, therefore, to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, three Persons and one God, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour and glory, might, majesty, and dominion, henceforth and for ever. Amen.

SERMON XXIV.

1 COR. ii. 9.

It is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

IT is characteristic of man, as distinguished from other inhabitants of this lower world, that he extends his views and his desires beyond the objects immediately before him ; that he is endowed with an excursive faculty, continually ranging out of the sphere wherein the body is confined, not limited in its views to the present moment, or even to the present state of existence ; but whose delight it is to retrace the past, to anticipate the future, to search after objects imperceptible to the outward senses, and to soar into those regions of conjecture and imagination, which to all inferior creatures seem to be precluded as sources of enjoyment or expectation.

The very existence of such a faculty affords

a strong presumptive evidence, that this world is not to be the limit of our existence. Its direct tendency is to excite aspirations after some higher state of being, adapted to a fuller exercise of its powers. And since there appears to be no other propensity inherent in us for which some provision is not made by our beneficent Creator, the inference is almost unavoidable, that this ardent desire of looking beyond things temporal, and directing our thoughts towards the invisible world, has not been bestowed upon us in vain. Yet certain it is, that nothing in our *present* state affords the means of satisfying this intellectual appetite, this hunger and thirst after things spiritual and eternal, which is perpetually craving what we find it impossible to obtain.

St. Paul, in the passage introductory to the words of the text, dilates upon the insufficiency of "the wisdom of this world" to give us an insight into those mysterious and sublime truths which the Christian revelation sets before us; and he disclaims all pretensions, on his own part, to ground them upon any discoveries of human knowledge. "Howbeit," says he, "we speak wisdom among them that are perfect; yet not the wisdom of this world: but we speak the wisdom of

“ God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom
 “ which God ordained before the world unto
 “ our glory, which none of the princes of this
 “ world knew :”—“ but as it is written, Eye
 “ hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have
 “ entered into the heart of man, the things
 “ which God hath prepared for them that
 “ love him.” This, together with the parallel
 passage in the prophet Isaiah ^a, is applicable
 to the whole Christian dispensation, as a ma-
 nifestation of God’s love to mankind which
 no human research could have discovered, no
 human imagination have conceived. But with
 peculiar force it may be understood to have
 reference to the unspeakable enjoyments re-
 served for the righteous in a future state ;
 these being “ the things which God hath pre-
 “ pared for them that love him ;” the things
 also which the heart of man most eagerly de-
 sires to know, but which hitherto no eye hath
 seen, nor ear heard, nor any powers of the
 human intellect have been able to apprehend.
 If, indeed, (as is most evident,) unenlightened
 reason has never yet been able satisfactorily
 to resolve even the great general question,
 whether there be a future state ; still less can
 it decide any particular questions relative to

^a Isaiah lxiv. 4.

that state, its mode of existence, its enjoyments or sufferings, its duration or extent. On these points all is darkness and uncertainty, till light breaks in upon them from the source of light, the revealed word of God. To the oracles, then, of holy writ we must bend our steps for the desired information.

Yet even here let us beware of indulging extravagant expectations. Though the Gospel unequivocally assures us of a future state, and represents the happiness of the righteous in that state in terms which leave us nothing either to ask or to desire more than is promised; yet its specific enjoyments are to be collected rather from figurative and incidental expressions, than from explicit and direct declarations. It guards, indeed, effectually against the fables of Paganism and the reveries of a licentious imagination; but it restrains inordinate curiosity, interposing a veil between this world and the next, and forbidding us to attempt the removal of it by unhallowed hands. Approaching the subject, therefore, with that humility and reverential awe which it ever ought to inspire, let us view it uninfluenced by any presumptuous desire to look beyond what is clearly revealed; content, on this as on every other

subject of spiritual research, to “walk by
“faith, not by sight.”

1. First, then, the Scriptures distinctly reveal to us, that in that blessed state which the people of God are hereafter to inherit, they shall no longer be subject to any kind of *evil*. “God shall wipe away all tears
“from their eyes, and there shall be no more
“death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither
“shall there be any more pain^b.” At once this seems to transport us to “the haven where
“we would be;” since, although it be a negative description of bliss, it conveys to our ideas an inestimable measure of substantial good. The happiest lot that can fall to man in this earthly state is chequered with griefs, perplexities, and troubles. Every one experienced in human life is ready to echo Job’s complaint, “Man is born to trouble, as the
“sparks fly upward^c.” In this respect there is “one event to the righteous and to the
“wicked^d;” and were there nothing to expect beyond this, many a righteous man might be tempted, as David was, to say, “Then have I
“cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my
“hands in innocency^e.” The exclusion, therefore, of evil of every kind, natural or moral,

^b Rev. xxi. 4.

^c Job v. 7.

^d Eccles. ix. 7.

^e Psalm lxxiii. 13.

from the state of the blessed hereafter, is that circumstance which, in our first contemplation of it, most forcibly arrests the attention. That there “remaineth a rest for the people of God^f,” where “the wicked cease from troubling^g,” and nothing can enter to create disquietude, imports at least a degree of perfection in happiness which none can hope to realize in the present life.

But this exemption from evil is far from being all that we are led to anticipate. Distinct intimations are given of a vast improvement in all our faculties, mental and corporeal; that our bodies shall be glorified, our wills and affections purified, our intellectual powers enlarged, and disencumbered from many impediments which now restrain and embarrass their operations.

2. Speaking of the resurrection of the *body*, St. Paul says, “It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body^h.” Elsewhere he more briefly affirms the same; “Christ shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like

^f Heb. iv. 9.
43, 44.

^g Job iii. 17.

^h 1 Cor. xv. 42,

“unto his glorious bodyⁱ.” In similar terms St. John expresses himself; “Beloved, it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is^k.” These several passages, taken together, though they convey no distinct image of what our glorified bodies shall be, certify us of two essential points, the identity of the body to be raised, and the great change it is to undergo in its advancement from one state to the other.

That such an identity shall be preserved as will still appropriate it to one and the same individual person in both states, and that the soul, to which it is to be re-united, shall be conscious of that sameness, may with certainty be inferred from St. Paul’s mode of expression; nor indeed can the notion of a resurrection be made fully intelligible without it. When the Apostle says of the body, that it is sown or buried in one state, and raised in another, he evidently describes the same thing under different circumstances; and he still more expressly adds, “This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality:”—*this* corruptible and *this* mortal, *this* which we

ⁱ Phil. iii. 21.

^k 1 John iii. 2.

now have, shall be endowed with incorruptible qualities, and enter upon a state of perfection entirely different from that in which it now exists. *Now* it is subject to wants and weaknesses, to pain, and sickness, and death, and many other humiliating contingencies: but it shall be raised free from these. *Now* it is a *natural* body, subject to decay; *then* it shall become *spiritual* in its qualities and operations; it shall be raised in incorruption, in glory, in power. The change, however, which the body shall then undergo is, from these very expressions, no less certain than the sameness of the body that shall arise. Different it will be, in the same sense that the plant which springs from the seed is different from the seed itself. But as to every seed is given its own body; so to every human soul now in the keeping of its Creator shall be given at the resurrection its own body, whatever transformation it may undergo. Respecting the nature of that transformation it is useless to inquire. God hath not revealed it. Nor is it necessary for the increase of our faith or hope that we should know it. Sufficient is it that we are assured it shall be above all that we can ask or think; that the word of God is pledged for this; and that nothing is revealed concerning it which it is

not in the power of the Almighty to accomplish.

3. Similar observations apply to that enlargement of our *intellectual* powers, and of our sphere of knowledge which is promised to us in a future state. St. Paul states this in very impressive terms: "Now we see through
" a glass darkly ; but then face to face. Now
" we know in part ; but then shall we know
" even as also we are known¹." In what particular attainments this knowledge will consist, is no where revealed ; neither do we know on what objects the human intellect may then be employed. Doubtless, it is of spiritual knowledge, (the knowledge of the Divine perfections, and of those truths relating to them which at present we can but partially and indistinctly apprehend,) that this promise is chiefly to be understood. Yet, judging from the vast variety of other knowledge which even in the present life is within our reach, and from the exquisite gratification which the attainment of it seldom fails to produce, we may not unreasonably conjecture that an infinitely wider range of objects will then be presented to our view, and many new truths unfolded to us, together with higher faculties of perception and intuition,

¹ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

to enable us more readily to apprehend them. Of enjoyments originating in such sources it may truly be said, not only that "eye hath not seen nor ear heard" them, but that it has never yet "entered into the heart" of man to conceive them.

4. With these sublimer expectations, however, are also intermingled in the sacred writings others more level to ordinary apprehensions, and more immediately addressed to our *social* feelings. Of such feelings all are more or less susceptible. All are in some degree sensible how much their happiness here depends upon being associated with those they love; with those whose tempers, habits, and dispositions are congenial with their own, or who by the ties of kindred and relationship are mutually endeared to each other. In these respects, what is revealed to us concerning the world to come is adapted to take strong hold on our affections.

An intimation, indeed, is given by our blessed Saviour, that our earthly relationships will then so far cease, as no longer to exact from us the same duties which now subsist between them. But it by no means necessarily follows, that the personal affections resulting from them will be extinguished. Rather does there seem reason to believe,

that in that state no inconsiderable portion of enjoyment may arise from a revival of those pure and virtuous sentiments which here attach us to each other, and from a recollection of those closer ties, the separation of which costs, even to the firmest Christian, a pang hard to be endured. David says of the beloved child that he had lost, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me^m." Our Lord promises to his Apostles a renewal of personal intercourse with Him in the mansions of his Father:—"I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am, ye may be alsoⁿ." St. Paul exhorts the Thessalonians "not to sorrow as men which have no hope" for their departed friends, but to "comfort one another" with the expectation of a joyful resurrection "together with them^o," in the day of the Lord. These are encouragements, at least, of a hope so congenial with our best natural feelings that it cannot easily be relinquished. Yet with respect to this expectation, it must ever be borne in mind, that nothing unholy, nothing discordant, will be permitted to sully the purity or disturb the peace of those heavenly mansions. All must be purified by faith, and perfected through the merits of the Redeemer and the sanctifi-

^m 2 Sam. xii. 23. ⁿ John xiv. 2, 3. ^o 1 Thess. iv. 15, 17, 18.

cation of the Spirit, before they can become “meet to be partakers of the heavenly inheritance.” No jarring passions, no selfish interests, no impure desires, will there be found. Love, joy, peace, the blessed fruits of the Spirit, can alone abide in the presence of God. The congregation of the righteous will there consist, not only of “the spirits of just men “made perfect,” by Him who accepts them as such, but of the angels of heaven, and even of our Lord himself. If, therefore, we cherish the hope of a re-union with those we love, how solicitous ought we to be to fix our affections on such as walk worthy of their Christian calling, and to promote both their salvation and our own, by adorning the “doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.”

5. Another point deserving of notice in our contemplation of a future state, is the intimation given us, that in that state there will be *degrees* of reward and bliss proportionate to our spiritual advancement in this present state of trial and probation. This might be inferred from our Lord’s declaration to his Apostles, “In my Father’s house “are many mansions^p.” It is more distinctly represented in the parable of the talents, where one is made a ruler over ten cities,

another over five ; and on another occasion, when he states, that one shall receive a prophet's reward ; another, a righteous man's reward ; and that he who gives a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, shall in no wise lose his reward ^q. St. Paul likens the different degrees of glory which the blessed shall enjoy, to the different degrees of splendor in the heavenly bodies, as “ one star differeth from another ^r.” Again he says, “ He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly ; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully ^s.” St. Peter exhorts the faithful to abound in every Christian grace, that “ so an entrance may be ministered unto them abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ^t.” What greater encouragement can there be to “ go on unto perfection ^v” in our Christian course, and to be “ always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour shall not be in vain ^w?” At the same time we are authorized to “ comfort the feeble-minded” with the assurance that an ample recompense is laid up for all the true disciples of Christ ; since though there are different

^q Matt. x. 41, 42.

^r 1 Cor. xv. 41.

^s 2 Cor. ix. 6.

^t 2 Pet. i. 11.

^v Hebr. vi. 1.

^w 1 Cor. xv. 58.

degrees of glory to be obtained, none will fall short of happiness perfect in its kind, and more than commensurate even to the desires or expectations of the possessor. No occasion of strife or envying, of repining or dissatisfaction, can possibly take place, where every heart and voice will unite in one strain of grateful adoration and praise, for mercies beyond all claims of merit, individually received.

6. This leads to another circumstance made known to us, in which all are equally concerned. All to whom the gates of heaven shall be opened will partake of that beatific vision, as it has been called; that transcendent bliss, which will flow from a more sensible manifestation of the Divine presence and perfections, than can be experienced in our earthly state:—"we shall see him as "he is^x," and "shall know even as we are "known^y." Some foretaste of this bliss appears to have been vouchsafed to St. Paul, when in a vision he was admitted to a transient perception of heavenly glories, and heard words which he declared it to be "not lawful," or rather not possible, "for a man to "utter^z." On the nature of this enjoyment, however, we may not presume to speculate,

^x 1 John iii. 2.

^y 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

^z 2 Cor. xii. 4.

nor even to think or speak upon the subject but with the deepest reverence; suppressing all vain imaginations concerning it, and waiting with patience that period when we may be admitted to some participation in a blessedness surpassing our utmost efforts at present to conceive.

7. Lastly, to these several intimations respecting the future condition of the righteous, is added that which heightens every one of them beyond our utmost conception, the certainty that, in whatever its specific enjoyments may consist, they will be *eternal*. This it is which gives their fullest and highest value to all our hopes and expectations. Without this, however exquisite might be the enjoyment, it would want one essential ingredient of real happiness; since the more perfect the enjoyment, the more painful would be the prospect of its coming to an end. On the other hand, any degree of good, unmixed with evil, derives an inestimable value from the certainty that it will never be taken away. The great moral argument that we deduce from the doctrine of a future state is, indeed, grounded chiefly on this assurance. We dissuade men from pursuing “the pleasures of sin for a season,” by setting before them joys imperishable and unceas-

ing. We exhort them to “make to themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that they may receive them into everlasting habitations^a.” We comfort them under the pressure of trouble and distress, by reminding them that their comparatively “light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory^b.” Thus the doctrine meets us on every occasion, whether of adversity or prosperity, urging us with an importunity not to be resisted, to “make our calling and election sure.”

Such is the prospect presented to us in holy writ of the condition of the blessed in the world to come. In the representation given of it, will be found nothing to shock the intellectual or the moral feelings of the most considerate and sober-minded, nothing to give even a momentary excitement to a licentious imagination. Here are no voluptuous dreams of a Mahometan paradise, no puerile fables of Elysium, no Bacchanalian revelries, no mystical follies or extravagancies. Every thing bespeaks its Author to be holy, just, and good; every thing is worthy of Him who is “of purer eyes than to behold iniquity;” every thing tends to elevate the affections,

^a Luke xvi. 9.

^b 2 Cor. iv. 7.

to enlarge the understanding, to improve the heart.

To unfold the practical application of the subject in all its bearings would be an inexhaustible undertaking. There is no part of human conduct that is not within the scope of its influence; not a deed, word, or thought, that is independent of its operation. It moreover teaches us what we are too apt to overlook, the intrinsic value of this life, as intended to qualify us for a better. It warns us, not only to endure with patience our continuance here, under whatever circumstances of discouragement or depression; but to be thankful also for such a prolongation of our existence as may afford us opportunities of progressive advancement towards Christian perfection, and consequently of obtaining a more excellent reward. At the same time it admonishes us, on the other hand, not to be so tenacious of the present life as to be reluctant to quit it whenever it shall please Him in whose hands are the issues of life and death, to call us to our rest. Whether of longer or of shorter duration, this life will always be sufficient, if rightly applied, for its great ultimate purpose, that of "working out our salvation," and securing our inheritance in life eternal. Nor does this apply

only to the prospect of our own dissolution. The same consideration is powerful above all others, to reconcile us to the loss of those who are most dear to us, when we are able to cherish a well-grounded hope that they are gone before us to endless joy and felicity. Painful as the separation may be, we feel it almost too selfish an emotion to murmur at their deliverance from a state of trial and of peril, to one in which they are even now among the souls of the faithful, awaiting their "perfect consummation and bliss, both in "body and soul," when, at the final coming of their Lord, they shall be received into his "eternal and everlasting glory."

Here, then, is a never-failing encouragement to alacrity in the performance of every duty, to fortitude and firmness under every trial and trouble, to full confidence and trust in God under all the changes and chances of this mortal life. Here too is the grand motive for steadfast resistance to our spiritual adversaries, with whatever temptations they may assail us; and for "continuing Christ's "faithful soldiers and servants unto our lives' "end." "Every one that hath" really and truly "this hope in him," labours to "purify "himself even as He is pure^c." Knowing

^c 1 John iii. 3.

that He who hath “left us an ensample that “we should follow his steps,” hath also purchased for us a “recompense of great reward,” all other considerations will be regarded but as dust in the balance. “Where “our treasure is, there will our hearts be “also ^d.”

^d Matth. iv. 21.

SERMON XXV.

2 CORINTHIANS V. 11.

Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men.

WHEN we set before men the proofs from the Holy Scriptures of a future state, we have to contend with every prejudice that can arise from a reluctance to believe in the punishments denounced against evil doers. If nothing but the expectation of happiness were included in the prospect of that state, there might be little difficulty in the removal of any doubts concerning it. But the liability to sufferings no less certain, and no less permanent, than the enjoyments which are set before us, is perhaps the most irremovable of all obstacles to the reception of the doctrine.

This, however, is a question not to be decided by such prepossessions. nor by any abstract notions of what we may conceive it befitting that infinite wisdom and goodness

should ordain. Divine authority alone can determine it. Yet thus far we might venture abstractedly to reason upon the subject, that if happiness be the just recompense of faith and obedience, unhappiness must be no less the recompense of unbelief and disobedience. The great moral evidence of a future state, apart from Revelation, results from the imperfect retribution that takes place in this present life. Vice and virtue, obedience and disobedience, do not here receive their full deserts: and hence it is presumed that hereafter the imperfection will be remedied. Consistency seems to require that this should take place impartially on either side; and wherever the belief of future retribution has taken root, this consequence appears to have been uniformly admitted. To separate the one from the other, or to shrink from the acceptance of a doctrine pregnant with consequences so momentous, upon grounds altogether unstable and precarious, betrays weakness rather than sound discernment, and may be perilous in the extreme.

The Apostle, it appears from the words of the text, would not suffer the effect of this doctrine to be weakened through a mistaken tenderness for the feelings of his hearers.

“ We must all appear,” says he, “ before the judgment-seat of Christ ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men.” A most powerful instrument of persuasion it unquestionably is ; a truth which, when once established on the authority of Revelation, is not to be eluded by any arts of sophistry, or put down by human reasoning. And although of the miseries, no less than of the joys of the world to come, it may truly be said, “ Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive them ;” yet so much may be collected on the subject from sacred writ, as to make every one, who is not “ past feeling,” tremble at the thought of acquiring a more intimate knowledge of them from his own experience. Taking, then, the Scriptures for our guide, let us approach this fearful subject, and endeavour to obtain some insight into those regions of “ indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish,” which are revealed to us as prepared for the impenitent and incorrigible, and to be their final and irreversible portion.

1. As in delineating the happiness of a fu-

ture state we first considered it as a state of exemption from evil of every kind; so in enumerating the future woes that await the wicked, our first attention is drawn to their total exclusion from the comforts of the Divine presence, and from all the pure and perfect enjoyments attendant upon the state of the blessed. "The Son of man will gather "out of his kingdom all things that offend^a;" and his sentence to the impenitent and incorrigible will be, "I know you not; depart from "me, ye cursed^b." From the abodes of the righteous will be excluded all pain, sorrow, and disquietude; from those of the wicked will be excluded all that can mitigate pain, alleviate sorrow, or soothe disquietude. This is a degree of misery, of which none, perhaps, in this present state can form an adequate conception. In this life even the most wicked seem not to be entirely debarred from a participation of the blessings enjoyed by the righteous; since both the tares and the wheat grow together until the harvest; and the same sun shines on the just and the unjust, on the thankful and the evil. The only resemblance here approaching to such a state appears to be that of a wretched sinner at the close of life, when all the scenes of this world

^a Matt. xiii. 41.

^b Matt. xxv. 41.

are vanishing from his sight, and he is just awakened to a sense of the judgment impending over him; "his soul refusing comfort," and finding "no help for him in his God." This seems, indeed, to be to the wicked, a foretaste of what they shall endure when forever cut off from all access to Him who is the Fountain of goodness, the refuge of the distressed, the consolation of the penitent, the support and joy of the faithful. The hope of redemption, if ever it had been entertained, will then have utterly vanished. The time of mediation and intercession will be past. Penitence will avail nothing. Sin, the sting of death, will still remain, with no means of its removal; while the sense of their desolate condition will be inconceivably heightened by the contrast presented to their thoughts between the joys they have forfeited and the doom to which they are consigned. To know that "life and death, blessing and cursing, have been set before them," and that their sad destiny is the result of their own perverseness, is in itself a consideration sufficient to overwhelm the mind with the bitterness of self-reproach.

2. But, secondly, this will be greatly aggravated by the continuance of those evil dispositions which we are assured the wicked will

carry with them into the other world. The punishments of a future state will fall upon those only who have become incurably wicked, “past feeling^c,” “given over to a reprobate mind^d ;” and who, consequently, will go into that state with tempers and inclinations on which admonition and correction had proved unavailing. These hateful qualities will still remain, and will be their own tormentors. “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still ; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still ; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still ; and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly ; and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be^e.” Therefore, as the rewards of the righteous will partly consist in carrying on and perfecting those good dispositions, which by God’s grace they had cultivated here ; so, it appears, shall the sufferings of the wicked be in part effected by the continuance and the increase of those evil passions and propensities which even here are a constant source of disquietude and torment. Envy, hatred, malice, rage, disappointment, operating, perhaps, upon a quicker sensibility, and continually awakened by surrounding objects, we may conceive

^c Eph. iv. 19.^d Rom. i. 28.^e Rev. xxii. 12.

excessively to aggravate the burthen of un-availing remorse. To subdue these emotions may then also be impossible. The Spirit of God will no longer “strive with them.” Their faith will be that of the devils, “who believe “and tremble;” not that which “worketh by “love” to God or man. They will feel the sorrow that “worketh death;” not that which “worketh repentance not to be repented of.” They will become victims of despair; despair, arising from the impossibility of retrieving what is lost, or of being liberated from the evil that is come upon them.

3. Thirdly, in addition to this mental anguish, fearful intimations are given in scripture of bodily sufferings also. “Every one,” says St. Paul, “shall receive the things done “in his body, according to that he hath done, “whether it be good or bad^f;” that is, (as some distinguished expositors interpret it,) he shall receive in his body the reward of his good or evil deeds; in other words, he shall participate in corporal enjoyments or corporal sufferings. The precise nature of these sufferings is no where revealed, nor do we know what change the body will undergo, to prepare it for such retribution. But those tremendous expressions, “the lake of fire and

^f 2 Cor. v. 10.

“brimstone;” “the worm that dieth not, and
“the fire that is not quenched;” “the weep-
“ing, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth;”
whether literally or figuratively intended, convey some meaning evidently connected with the body: and even the assurance that in the state of future bliss “there shall be no
“more pain,” leads us to apprehend, that in that of future misery bodily as well as mental pain will be no inconsiderable ingredient of the bitter cup that is to be apportioned.

4. But, further, these sufferings, whatever they may be, and whether of mind or of body, will be unspeakably heightened by unceasing intercourse with wicked men, with wicked spirits, and with the Evil One himself, triumphing over the victims of his malice. This is to be inferred from our Lord’s declaration of the sentence to be passed at the day of judgment: “Then shall he say unto them on
“the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed,
“into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil
“and his angels[§].” Can we picture to ourselves a doom of greater wretchedness, than continually to associate with beings of such a description, abandoned to mutual reproaches and fruitless lamentations? We know but too well, here on earth, how fertile are the in-

§ Matt. xxv. 41.

ventions of the wicked in rendering the lives of others no less miserable than their own. In this state, therefore, of irretrievable condemnation, what a consummation of misery may we not suppose them capable of inflicting upon each other !

5. This, again, suggests another fearful point of contrast between the future condition of the righteous and the wicked, not to be contemplated without the most awakening emotions. If we are warranted in expecting that a personal recollection of each other will constitute a portion of the bliss in heaven, must we not also suppose that a similar recollection will operate to increase the misery of the wicked ? In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus this is very affectingly represented by the unhappy sufferer's pleading for relief from the hand of Lazarus, and his entreating that a warning might be sent to his brethren, "lest they also should come into "that place of torment^h." If, then, we suppose the wicked in that state to see and to recollect those who were most dear to them here on earth brought into the same condemnation with themselves, and probably through the influence of their evil example ; will not this be indeed filling up the measure

^h Luke xvi. 28.

of their suffering ; will it not be drinking the cup of bitterness to its very dregs ?

6. The scriptures, moreover, (as if to leave nothing untouched upon this subject which could possibly operate upon our personal or social feelings,) admonish us of other circumstances connected with these recollections, and adapted to make impression on tempers and dispositions of different kinds. “Some shall awake to shame and everlasting contemptⁱ.” “The hope of the hypocrite shall perish^k.” “Every man’s work shall be made manifest. For the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work, of what sort it is^l.” The hidden things of darkness shall be brought to light. These are considerations by which many an offender now triumphant in wickedness, or practising it in secret and saying that no eye shall see him, may be touched to the quick. Does he escape censure in this world ? has he risen even to honour and pre-eminence by his crimes ? is he idolized by an admiring but misjudging multitude ? has he been able by a plausible exterior, or adroitness in the arts of dissimulation, to make the worse appear the better cause, and to win golden opinions even from the wise and good ? what

ⁱ Dan. xii. 2.

^k Job viii. 13.

^l 1 Cor. iii. 13.

will be his recompense? Before men and angels his shame shall be proclaimed. His “sin will surely find him out^m.” Nothing has been hid which shall not then be known. His degradation will be in proportion to the height from which he had fallen. His exposure will bring to nought the depth of the artifice by which he had hoped for ever to conceal the iniquity of his ways.

7. In considering, however, that “revelation of the righteous judgments of God” which is impending over all who have forfeited the hope of a blessed resurrection, we are not to imagine that it will fall with equal weight upon offenders of every description. Not only would our own notions of the Divine equity incline us to expect different degrees of shame and suffering hereafter for the wicked, as well as of honour and happiness for the righteous; but the expectation is borne out by the intimations of holy writ. Our Lord warned the inhabitants of Chorazin and Bethsaida, who had heard the Gospel and rejected it, that it would be “more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the “day of judgment than for themⁿ.” Of those who neglect the salvation offered to them, some, he tells us, “shall be beaten with many

^m Numb. xxxii. 23.

ⁿ Matt. x. 15.

“ stripes, and some with few^o.” So justly will the dealings of the Almighty with sinners be apportioned, as to leave no room at that great day for remonstrance or complaint. Nay, we may well conceive it to be a part even of the punishment the sufferers themselves shall endure, to be conscious that it is no more than they have amply deserved ; so that every mouth shall be stopped, and none dare to arraign the equity of his own sentence, whatever it may be ; every individual sinner being constrained to acknowledge his own presumptuous folly in disregarding the threatened penalty, until made sensible of it by woful experience. Nevertheless, let none persuade themselves that any of these judgments will be so comparatively light as to lessen the dread of undergoing them. For whether the degree of suffering be more or less, still it is misery and woe irremediable, unmitigable, and interminable. This latter consideration, indeed, it is which ought to dispel all illusions tending to disarm the doctrine of its terrors, or to lull the conscience into a security that may be fatal. Whatever may be their diversity in other respects, the eternal duration of the sufferings is that which gives them their severest poignancy.

^o Luke xii. 47, 48.

8. The passages of Scripture by which this point is established are so numerous, and so direct to the purpose, that we might wonder at the hardness of those who can venture to give them any other interpretation. Not only is the future state of the wicked described as “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power^p,” but the place of torment is called “fire unquenchable,” and “everlasting fire:” a place “where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched^q.” To a person of plain understanding, the attempt to set aside terms of such obvious signification appears to be hopeless. But we scarcely need any other proof than the clear and unambiguous expressions of our Lord himself: “these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal^r.” Where can be the difference between *everlasting* and *eternal*; terms which are indeed rendered in the original by one and the same word? In whatever sense, therefore, we interpret that word with respect to the righteous, in the same must we understand it with reference to the wicked: and whatever tends to lessen its force in the one case will necessarily weaken it in the other.

As to the speculations which well-inten-

^p 2 Thess. i. 9.

^q Mark ix. 44.

^r Matt. xxv. 46.

tioned persons have sometimes hazarded, with a view to establish the persuasion of a final restoration of the wicked to a state of happiness, after a protracted and indefinite period of suffering ; or their total annihilation when that period shall have expired ; it is enough to say, that being unwarranted by sober deduction from scripture authorities, they are, at the best, but human conjectures, entitled to no implicit deference, and little likely to repay the trouble of inquiry. Thus far, however, we are assured, that after death “ there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin^s,” that “ where the tree falleth, there shall it “ be^t ;” that when the final resurrection and judgment shall have taken place, our Lord “ will deliver up the kingdom to the Father^v,” and consequently his office of Mediator and Intercessor will thenceforth entirely cease. These assurances, in addition to the more direct proofs from scripture already cited, sufficiently indicate that after the day of judgment no change is to be expected, either in the nature or the condition of those, whether righteous or wicked, on whom the sentence of acquittal or condemnation shall have then been actually passed. Far better is it, on such a subject, to submit our under-

^s Heb. x. 26.^t Eccles. xi. 3.^v 1 Cor. xv. 24.

standings to the simple, authoritative declarations of God's word, than to put our faith to hazard by listening to the reveries of sceptical or inquisitive persons, "the disputers of this world," prone to reject whatever is uncongenial with their own preconceptions. More consonant is it also with Christian prudence and Christian humility, to expect and to prepare for so tremendous an issue, than to seek motives and reasonings for calling it in question. Enough is revealed to certify us that "the Judge of all the earth will do right^w;" and on that conviction let our hopes and fears be rested, as on a foundation never to be shaken. If, indeed, these awful realities are to take place, what will it then avail us "to contend with "the Almighty^x;" to impeach his justice or his mercy; to plead our imperfect notions of either in excuse for our incredulity or neglect? Who will then be able to stand against that rebuke, "Are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal^y?"

It will surely be our wisdom not to shrink from contemplating this "wrath of God revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men^z," much more not to "trea-

^w Gen. xviii. 25.

^x Job xl. 2.

^y Ezek. xviii. 29.

^z Rom. i. 18.

“sure up unto ourselves wrath against the
“day of wrath, and revelation of the right-
“eous judgment of God^a.” The aggregate
of woes and miseries which that judgment
may bring upon us, it is fearful indeed to
think upon. Total and final exclusion from
the presence of God, from the society of the
blessed, and from all the enjoyments prepared
for them; hopeless envy and unavailing re-
morse; pains of body and anguish of mind;
raging passions tormenting their own victims,
and adding to the torment of others; constant
intercourse with beings miserable as them-
selves; the same sinful propensities which had
been their delight here now operating to their
continual punishment; their pride turned to
shame, their fame to infamy, their cunning
to folly; these are among the sufferings which
we may not unreasonably infer from the re-
presentations set before us. And though there
may be different degrees of this suffering pro-
portionate to the case of the individual of-
fender; yet the consideration that even the
least of these is irremediable and eternal, may
well admonish us how “fearful a thing it is
“to fall into the hands of the living God^b.”

“Knowing, therefore, the terrors of the

^a Rom. ii. 5.

^b Hebr. x. 31.

“ Lord, we persuade men.” It is in mercy towards us that these terrors are revealed. It is to deter us from sin, and to incite us to repentance and holiness. For “ the wages “ of sin is death.” Death is its necessary consequence, misery its genuine fruit; and the punishments annexed to it, whether in this life or the next, are not merely the act of God’s sovereign will and power, but the result of the evil disposition itself, adhering to the impenitent and irreclaimable. “ As I live, “ saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in “ the death of the wicked; but that the wicked “ ed should turn from his way and live^c :” and these dreadful consequences are set before us, that we may be persuaded to “ know” and consider, “ in this our day, the things which “ belong unto our peace,” before “ they are “ hid from our eyes^d.” Thus the goodness, no less than the justice of God, is displayed in that very circumstance which the evil-minded are wont to represent as irreconcilable with both.

Being apprised of these salutary truths, we are also made so much the more sensible of the danger of sin, and of the value of that deliverance from it wrought by the redemp-

^c Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

^d Luke xix. 42.

tion that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. For (blessed be God!) it is not every offence, nor even the greatest offences, that can now shut the door of mercy against us. The way of life is open to all who with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto the Lord their God. And although "wide is the gate, and broad "is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and "many there be which go in thereat^e;" yet are we assured that "a great multitude which "no man can number, of all nations, and "kindreds, and people, and tongues, shall "stand before the throne, and before the "Lamb, saying, Salvation to our God which "sitteth upon the throne, and unto the "Lamb, for ever and ever^f."

Encouraged by these promises on the one hand, and awed by these threatenings on the other, we shall be without excuse if we neglect to prepare for the consequences that must ensue. Nor let the preparation be delayed. "The night cometh, when no man "can work^g." "Behold," therefore, "now is "the accepted time; behold, now is the day "of salvation^h."

^e Matth. vii. 13.

^g John ix. 4.

^f Rev. vii. 9.

^h 2 Cor. vi. 2.

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